

WHAT DO YOUNG MEN MARRY?—See page 45.

THE LONDON READER

of Literature, Science, Art, and General Information.

[ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.]

[No. 1695.—VOL. LXVI.]

FOR THE WEEK ENDING OCTOBER 26, 1895.

[PRICE ONE PENCE.]



"PROMISE ME THAT YOU WILL THINK SOMETIMES OF THE PLEASANT HOURS WE HAVE HAD TOGETHER," SAID GEOFFREY.

THE BANKER'S HEIRESS.

[A NOVELETTE.]

CHAPTER I.

A HOUSE at Staines—a quaint, many-windewed, gabled residence, shut in by high walls from the too intrusive gaze of the passer-by, and with wide, picturesque grounds, sloping down to the river's bank; an unpretentious place enough, and yet bearing every mark of its owner's wealth.

The velvet grass of the lawns, the luxuriance of blossoms in the conservatory, the beautiful order of all that met the eye, told of an expensive head gardener, and his train of clever assistants.

Within all was the same. No pomp or grandeur—no meaningless show; yet nothing that

could please the taste or captivate the senses was wanting.

Through a grand old hall you passed to the drawing-room, whose walls were almost hidden by mirrors of Venetian glass, between which were stands of rare old china. The furniture was pale blue and ebony, the carpet of velvet pile.

One glance told you it was a rich man's house; and told you truly, for Sir John Graham, Bart., was what is called on 'Change a "safe man." He was the head of the great banking-house of Graham and Mortimer; and, besides Meadowview, and his Yorkshire property with its revenues, he drew from the business in Lombard street, it was said, not less than twenty thousand pounds a year.

Twenty thousand pounds a year and no son to succeed him in his wealth or honours at his death!

The Meadowview, Yorkshire estates, and title would pass to a distant—an almost unknown—cousin; and for the share in the great banking-

house and all his funded property there was no claimant but a slight, graceful girl, with oval cheeks and large brown velvety eyes, who, people said, was the only creature on earth Sir John really loved.

In truth, Sir John did something more than love her. From the moment she had been put into his arms, a motherless baby of a few hours' old, he had almost worshipped May.

From a child no wish of hers had been ungratified. For her sake he had heaped up riches; for her sake he still kept his position in the great banking-house of Graham and Mortimer. With her his hopes and thoughts began and ended.

It was a lovely August afternoon. May had wandered through the grounds to the river's bank.

She had stretched herself lazily under a tree, the broad-brimmed hat had fallen disregarded to her feet; her dark eyes fixed on the clear waters, and her thoughts very far away.

"It is all very beautiful," said the girl, half

aloud, recalling herself by an effort. "Oh! how I wish I had been a boy, and then I need never have left Meadowview. Why should it belong to a fourth or fifth cousin we have never even seen? I think it is decidedly unjust; and if I were the Queen——"

But what Miss Graham would have done had she been transformed into Her Most Gracious Majesty must remain uncertain.

The sound of footsteps roused her, and she started up. Doubtless it was her father returning; she must go to meet him. Never yet had Sir John come home to find her absent.

Her hat hanging idly on her arm, she turned towards the house.

A moment more and she was face to face with her father and a stranger.

The banker's heiress blushed. For a rich man's only child she was singularly unused to society.

True, at stated intervals formal dinner-parties were given at Meadowview. True, the Mortimers visited them occasionally without an invitation; but Sir John's friends were, for the most part, busy City men, who talked of banking or the Stock Exchange.

One glance told the girl this stranger was of another world. The set of his tie, the flower in his button-hole, told her as much.

"Lord Carlyon—my daughter. May, this is Lord Carlyon; he is one of our nearest Yorkshire neighbours, you know."

May returned the stranger's bow and smiled a gracious welcome.

"I don't like Yorkshire much," she said simply. "We hardly ever go there. Are you more faithful to your tenants, Lord Carlyon?"

The young viscount was vexed at the question. He deserted his Yorkshire home quite as entirely as Sir John Graham; but from widely different reasons. The baronet could never forget that it was where he brought his young wife a bride, and where he buried her barely a year later. Lord Carlyon's estate was mortgaged to the hilt, and the shooting on his moors let each session to whoever would purchase it; but he could not explain this to Miss Graham.

He had deemed it a lucky chance when he met Sir John that afternoon, and the latter invited him home. Might be not in the course of time extract a loan from this wealthy neighbour!

Yet another idea came to him as he stood there and saw the August sunshine falling on May's uncovered head—that a good way of redeeming his encumbered acres would be by wooing the banker's heiress.

"I do not wonder you forget Yorkshire," he said, gently, "when you have such a home here."

"You like Meadowview?"

"It seems to me a beautiful spot."

May looked up into his face with her wonderful brown eyes.

"I love it dearly!" she said, gently. "I don't think any other place could be the same to me."

"Have you lived here long?"

"Ever since I can remember."

Lord Carlyon sauntered along at her side, wondering why, in all the gaieties of the late season, he had never met this perfect face. Sir John unconsciously explained the enigma.

"You won't have so much time for Meadowview next year, child; remember your aunt's threats."

May made a little move of discontent.

Lord Carlyon laughed outright.

"Are they so very terrible, Miss Graham?"

"Dreadfully!"

"She is a foolish girl. My sister, Lady Merton, comes down now and then to try and keep us in order, and she has wrung from me a reluctant consent that May shall be presented next spring. She wished it to have been last April, but we both cried out for another year's respite."

"And you don't look forward to your *début*?"

"Not the least in the world."

"Society has no charms for you. Operas, balls, theatres, do you expect no pleasure from them?"

"We go to the opera every year. I make papa take me night after night; and we always see

the best things at the theatres. Papa drives with me in the park; and we ride together in the Row. It seems to me we have all the pleasures of the season already, and escape its bores."

"But society!"

"I have quite enough of that," said May, quaintly. "Every now and then we have a dinner-party, and it is so prosy I always feel inclined to go to sleep."

"I cannot believe that."

"Which I that the dinner parties are prosy, or that I want to go to sleep?"

"The first."

"Come and see," she said. "We have another next week; papa will be delighted to invite you."

"And papa's daughter!"

"It won't make it any worse," she said, with painful frankness.

He felt annoyed.

Geoffrey Viscount Carlyon was not accustomed to be treated so cavalierly; he whom the belles of the season had smiled upon to be slighted by a girl hardly out of the schoolroom. Heiress or no heiress he would not stand it!

And then he remembered the necessities of Carlyon Towers, and the many thousands which must come to Sir John's daughter.

Besides, how beautiful she was; in a few years' time she would be the loveliest woman in London!

She did not keep them long alone; in a very few minutes she re-entered the drawing-room, and Geoffrey almost started with admiration.

He had called her beautiful before, yet he had never guessed she could look so irresistibly attractive.

And yet her dress was simple in the extreme, so simple that it was the more striking—a princess robe of some heavy white material falling in loose folds around her supple, girlish figure, and confined at the waist by a broad silver girdle; a chain of silver at her neck supported a Maltese cross, and the open hanging sleeves showed the delicate wrists almost covered with silver bangles.

No trace of colour broke the harmony of her white attire except a single rose of a dark crimson shade fastened carelessly in the bodice of her dress.

"She is worthy a duke's coronet," thought Geoffrey; and then he found himself offering her his arm and taking her into dinner.

He was surprised to find that the two who lived such a retired life talked easily and with interest on all the subjects of the day.

May showed that even if she denounced society she was well versed in its doings. She had been to the Academy and discussed its contents with able criticism.

The one foible which appeared in her impressed Lord Carlyon rather favourably than otherwise. She evidently possessed a considerable amount of pride, gentle as she seemed.

Geoffrey saw that, far beyond wealth or luxury, she valued her gentle blood; that she gloried in being a Graham of Grahamsville, while she cared little for being the heiress of one of the largest banking-houses in London.

"What a lucky thing she is well off," he thought, carelessly. "She is too gently reared for poverty, and she would never stoop to marry a *nouveau riche* had he the mines of Golconde!"

The gentlemen did not linger over their wine, but soon followed May into the pleasant lamp-lit drawing-room.

"I am sure you sing," said Geoffrey, going up to his young hostess, and taking a cup of coffee from her hands.

There was no hesitation in her answer.

"Yes."

"Then you will let us hear you?"

She crossed the room to the piano and seated herself. Geoffrey loved music almost passionately. For a moment he felt he should be disappointed. What could this girl, with her strange bringing up, know of music? He need not have feared. A few soft, rich chords, and then in a clear, powerful voice, whose every note was full of harmony, she began an old Scotch ballad,—

"Ye banks and braes of bonny Doon,"

Geoffrey listened in breathless silence until she had finished; he was about to express his eager thanks when he noticed a suspicious moisture about the big brown eyes.

"It is a lovely song," he said, gently; "but, forgive me, it is too sad for you."

"Why?"

It seemed to him that this young lady had the most remarkable knack of asking downright questions. This was their first meeting, and already she cross-examined him quite naturally.

"Why?" repeated May.

"You are too young and happy to think of sorrow; your life should be all sunshine."

"It is all sunshine," repeated May, simply. "Do you know, Lord Carlyon, in all my life I have never known a sorrow—have never felt one shadow of a grief! I think sometimes it is a dreadful thing for me."

"It is a very happy thing!"

"But supposing I am having all my sunshine now—that the next twenty years of my life are all clouds—how shall I bear them?"

"Clouds will never touch you, Miss Graham; you will find people only too ready to smooth your way for you."

"I do not want anyone to do that; I have papa."

Geoffrey looked at her with a strange light in his blue eyes—a smile of wonderful sweetness playing about his mouth. She was so innocent, so unconscious of any affection, save that she had for her father. Would it be his happy task to awaken that sleeping heart—to teach those brown eyes to shine with love?

"You are laughing at me, Lord Carlyon."

"I could not," he said earnestly. "I was only thinking, Miss Graham."

"About me?"

"Yes."

"What was it?"

"I should offend you."

"No, I would rather hear."

"I was thinking Sir John would not always be all powerful in your life; that a day must come when someone else would be nearer to you."

To his surprise she did not attempt to misunderstand him; she never blushed or hesitated.

"I shall never marry anyone," she said. "Papa and I shall always be as we are now," and then she rose from the music-stool, and walked across to his side.

That was the picture. Lord Carlyon carried away with him—the baronet's stately figure and grave, earnest face, the girl in the first bloom of her womanhood, one hand resting on his shoulder, a world of tenderness for him shining in her brown eyes.

"She shall be mine!" decided Geoffrey, as he walked through the quaint old town on his way to the railway station. "With her grace and beauty she would honour any rank. I little thought, when Sir John brought me to Meadowview, what was in store. For the sake of Carlyon I could have married a plain woman, but such a sacrifice will not be needed, for once interest and inclination can go hand-in-hand. Will she love me? No woman ever yet frowned on my advances; May will not be the first. I shall win that imperious wayward heart, and that sweet brown head will find its home on my shoulder. Heigho! I am positively getting sentimental."

CHAPTER II.

"Did you like Lord Carlyon, May?"

This point-blank question rather discomposed Miss Graham; she hesitated.

"I know so little of him, dear."

"I have asked him to come again; I think he will do so. Shall you be pleased to see him?"

"Very!" admitted May. "He is not like the Mortimers and their set, papa."

"Theodore Mortimer is a gentleman, May."

"Maybe," said the heiress, lightly; "but there is a flavour of trade about him, as though he was not quite used to his present position. Now,

Lord Carlyon is different; you know at once that he comes of a noble family."

"I cannot think what has given you such conservative notions, May. Trade is honest and honourable; to it our country owes—"

May studded her fingers in her ears.

"Spare me, papa—spare me! Trade may be everything delightful; but anyone engaged in trade is positively odious. I don't believe people in trade have the same feelings—the same code of honour as we have."

"May!"

There was no mistaking the reproach in his voice. She kissed him fondly.

"Why need you mind my saying it? The Grahams are not in trade, not one of them would have lowered himself to such a thing!"

Sir John let the remark pass.

"I can't think where you got your notions," he said, almost fretfully.

"They were born with me, I think, papa. Aunt Hilda always praises me for them."

"Aunt Hilda is an idiot!"

May felt aggrieved; she was not used to such a reception of her remarks.

"I think you are very cross, dear," she said, plaintively. "Why you take up the cudgels so for tradespeople I can't think; but you know I'd do anything in the world to please you. Shall I tell Sims to ask the baker's young man and the butcher's assistant to dine with you to-morrow, and send a line to my dressmaker begging her to spend the day with me?"

"May!" laughing in spite of himself—"you really are quite incorrigible about this."

"Quite," said Miss Graham, firmly; "but, there, I have made you laugh, so I don't care a bit."

But she would have cared could she have seen the shadow which settled on his face when she had left him for the night, and he went into a little room called his study.

The banker opened a small black bag he had brought that day from his office, took from it a goodly bundle of papers, and drawing a chair to his writing-table, commenced to study them.

Far on into the night he sat there, and the grey dawn of the morning had come, when, pale and haggard, he at last rose and began to think of retiring.

"My little May!" came from his lips with a bitter groan. "May Heaven help her; it will fall hardest upon her. Oh, my child! my darling! would that I could die for you! It was a strange chance my meeting young Carlyon to-day. How struck he seemed with May! If that could be a match my worst anxiety would be relieved. He is not rich; but what right have I to expect a wealthy son-in-law! And she cares less for fortune than for rank; as Lady Carlyon she would be safe; a husband's love and care would ward off much of the bitterness of the blow! Oh, May! my darling! the apple of my eye, to think that I should look forward to parting from you with positive relief!"

But despite his impassioned regrets, despite that long nocturnal watch, he was in his place at the breakfast table punctually at half-past nine the next morning—May in the daintiest of pink ginghams, a mass of nanos flounces and white lace, stood at a his side, with her own hands fastening a late rosebud in his buttonhole.

"Stay at home," she pleaded. "It is much too hot for you to go to Lombard-street; and, besides, I want you."

He shook his head.

"Business first, little girl."

"Why can't Mr. Mortimer see to it?"

"I prefer my own head to his. Take care of yourself, May. If Lord Carlyon should call with that music he spoke of I shall be home at five."

For Geoffrey had craved permission to bring Miss Graham some songs which he felt sure would just suit her voice.

May nodded.

"He won't come."

But nevertheless she was just the least bit disappointed when the afternoon passed without bringing him.

Two more days came and went with the same result; at last, on the fourth, just as Miss

Graham had decided he never meant to come at all, the servant announced him.

She had not expected visitors. She was sitting in a shady corner of the drawing-room, still in her pink gingham, diligently occupied in needle-work; the said work was neither elegant nor ornamental, being nothing more or less than a rough woolen petticoat designed for a village *protégée* in the coming winter.

"I thought you had forgotten all about them," she said, as Lord Carlyon presented the songs.

"I did not like to intrude upon you sooner," he answered, quickly. "Had I followed my own wishes I should have been here the afternoon after my first visit."

"Do you live in London?" inquired Miss Graham, abruptly.

"I don't live anywhere. I am that most wretched creature, a bachelor, Miss Graham."

"But you must live somewhere!"

"I sleep at my chambers at Clarges-street, and I dine at my club. You can't call that living anywhere, can you?"

"Yes," persisted May. "And are you all alone?"

"Completely. I have no near relations except my mother, and she lives in the country."

"Doesn't she want you with her?"

He shook his head.

"Our ways are too different. I should like you to see my mother, Miss Graham."

"She wouldn't like me."

"I am sure she would!"

"Old ladies never do."

"Did I say she was an old lady?"

"I thought she must be," said May, blushing.

"Because she is my mother you must have a strong belief in my antiquity, Miss Graham; as it happens, my mother is forty-seven and I am twenty-six, so we are neither of us quite venerable yet."

"Twenty-six sounds old."

"Compared to eighteen, perhaps. Have you forgotten your promise, Miss Graham?"

"What was it?"

"To show me your grounds. Don't you remember you told me they sloped down to the river's bank?"

She rose at once, took up her hat and led the way out through the French windows out into the garden. Side by side the two walked on through paths, sweet with the scent of summer flowers, until a sudden curve brought them in sight of Father Thames, majestic in the tranquillity of his summer beauty.

"That is our boat," said May, pointing to one lying moored to a post near them. "Papa and I used often to go for long rows, but this summer he is always tired or too busy."

"Will you trust yourself to me?" asked Geoffrey, a little eagerly, not too sure what her reply would be, but she assented at once. A moment more and the boat was freed from her moorings, and the two were gliding pleasantly down the river.

"It is delicious on the water!" said May, gaily. "It was so hot indoors I could not find a cool corner to sit in, but here there is a delightful breeze. Isn't it nice?"

"It is more than nice—it is delightful."

"But you will be tired," as she watched the busy splash of the oars. "I forgot it was hard work for you, Lord Carlyon."

"I should never be tired," he answered eagerly. "I could row on for ever—just we two."

She answered nothing; child as she was, innocent as she might be of all pertaining to the passion love, there was a nameless something in his words, a seriousness in his voice, which she could not fail to notice.

Her eyes drooped beneath the admiring gaze of those blue ones. She was not ready with any gay repartee; she could only sit silent, her ungloved hand playing idly with the waves, and so they drifted on.

"Promise me something," cried the Viscount, passionately, when the boat had turned, and the two were returning swiftly to Staines. "Promise me something, Miss Graham!"

She answered nothing, and still her eyes would not meet his gaze—he persevered.

"At least, I may ask my boon—you will not be angry!"

"No."

"Then promise me that you will never forget this afternoon—that you will think sometimes of the pleasant hour we have had together—just our two selves alone together!"

They were very near together. Geoffrey leaned forward, so that his breath almost fanned her cheek, as he waited for her answer.

It came at last, one little word, tremblingly spoken, so tremblingly that it only just reached his ear.

"Yes."

Geoffrey knew too well to imperil his cause by saying more. In perfect silence he fastened the boat to its moorings and handed May out; then he followed her to the house and took his leave—a simple, courteous farewell, such as he might have offered to a duchess without exciting the jealousy of the duke particularly interested in her grace.

Almost before May knew he was going he was gone.

The girl threw herself upon the sofa and tried to think; but it was not easy to think with the memory of those blue eyes haunting her—with the tones of that musical voice ringing in her ears.

What did he mean? Why did he look at her like that? Why should he ask her to remember him?

He had only seen her twice; she could be nothing to him but a stranger whom he might never meet again.

At the last idea May broke down; she buried her head in the cushions and shed the bitterest tears she had ever known.

"I wish he had never come," she sobbed; "I wish I had never seen him! I was so happy before, so quietly content, and now nothing can ever be quite the same again."

And the banker's heiress was right. Child as she had been, until that day she had grasped, in a few words, the meaning of the greatest change that can ever come in a woman's life—first love.

Nothing can ever be the same again. It may not be the love of one life; it may not be the love that is to end in matrimony; it may bring us bitterest sorrow, sweetest joy; but whatever, whichever its effect, one thing is sure of every first love, happy or unfortunate—nothing can ever be the same again.

We ourselves are changed; careless, unconscious childhood has gone for ever, and womanhood and realities have come.

May wore a coloured dress that night instead of the quaint white costume which had so taken Lord Carlyon's fancy.

Some subtle instinct told the girl her pale cheeks and heavy eyes would not bear the test of that heavy white drapery.

For once in his life Sir John had to do without his daughter's greeting. She was dressing when he returned, and only emerged from her own room, an hour later, when the dinner-bell sounded.

"Tired, little one?"

"A little," returned the girl, wearily; "I believe I have given myself a headache."

"Wandering about in the heat! I wish you would remember you have not a cast-iron constitution, May."

"I went on the water," returned May, bent on confession; "Lord Carlyon came to bring me those songs, and he proposed a row."

"Carlyon been! Why didn't you keep him to dinner?" asked Sir John.

"I never thought of it. He went directly we came off the water—half-past four, I think."

"And you knew I was coming at five; and he is the son of one of my oldest friends. Did you find him such a very tiresome companion, pet, that you couldn't bear with him half-an-hour longer?"

"I never thought of it," repeated May.

"And I have lost his card, so that I have no idea of his address. He didn't mention it, I suppose!"

"Yes,"—wondering that she had heard and remembered—"he said he had chambers in

Clarges street, and that his mother lived in the country."

"Ah!—poor Lady Carlyon!"

"Why is she poor, papa?"

"She is perfectly crazy upon the subject of religion—wears a poke-bonnet and rough serge dress, and deems anything more ornamental wicked. She worried her husband into an early grave; and if the trustees hadn't interfered, would have brought up her son to be a dissenting minister."

"He doesn't look like one!"

"No; they separated him completely from his mother. It was a pity, rather; she was a beautiful woman, and she can't be fifty yet."

May did not think it needful to say the viscount had favoured her with his mother's age and his own.

"Lord Carlyon seems very cheerful, in spite of his family history."

"Yes, he's a nice young fellow; don't you think so, May?"

But May busied herself with her peach, and kept silence. She did not feel sure of her own voice if she trusted it to speak just then.

Two or three days later Sir John met Geoffrey in town, and brought him home to dinner; and after that the young people often met.

The viscount was always finding excuses for coming to Meadowview; there were songs and new books to bring to May; knotty points over which to consult Sir John. Two or three days in every week were sure to see Geoffrey at Staines.

And about that time Sir John's study, could if have told tales, might have declared that its master's spirits were much higher—that the nightly examination of papers almost ceased. And one evening he threw himself into his chair and almost sobbed with thankfulness.

"We shall weather the storm yet. My May will be the heiress she has always thought herself. I believe Geoffrey would have taken her without a penny—Heaven bless him! But I'm glad my girl won't go to her husband a dowerless lassie for all that."

And then the crisis came. Sir John had wondered for days why the young fellow did not speak out.

The servants had expected Miss Graham's engagement to be announced until they despaired of it.

May had tortured herself with many a doubt before Lord Carlyon asked for the heart he had been wooing so steadily in the summer sunshine.

It was a September afternoon, and he had come over unexpectedly, as he so often did, and strolling through the grounds with May he had suggested they should go upon the water. She agreed; in those days she agreed to all he proposed.

It was just such another day as that on which they had made their first excursion.

Suddenly, as they were returning, Lord Carlyon bent forward towards his companion,—

"Do you remember a promise you made me here?"

There was no evading the question in his eyes.

"Yes," she faltered.

"Darling, I want you to make me another. May, will you promise to go through life at my side as my loved and honoured wife?"

She hesitated—she was so happy.

"May!" he repeated.

"Are you sure you love me?"

"Am I sure I am alive! Darling, surely you cannot doubt my affection—my word!"

"No," she said, gently; "only it is all so new—so strange."

"Strange that I should love you!"

"Will you love me always?"

"Until my life's end."

The little hand glided into his; Geoffrey knew he had won his wish. A moment more and they landed, and stood together in the secluded grounds of Meadowview.

"You are sure you will not change?" she pleaded. "I do not think I could bear that!"

"I am sure I love you more than all the world, you doubting child!" and then, before she knew

what he was about, he had taken her in his arms, and was pressing passionate kisses upon her lips.

She trembled in that close embrace. He was her free choice, her first love, and yet no sense of security or protection seemed to have come to her. She yielded implicitly to his will; she nestled in his arms and let him kiss her and call her his own, his darling, but for all that no confidence came to her.

She felt like a frightened child; her old ease and dignity failed her. The self-possessed mistress of Meadowview had changed into a timid, shrinking girl.

"You will be the fairest Lady Carlyon my house has ever known," said Geoffrey, fondly. "My darling, you will not make me wait too long for my wife; think how lonely I am, and how much I love you."

"You have known me such a short time," she whispered, shyly.

"Long enough to know my own mind. Why, little one, I made up that the first evening I ever came to Meadowview."

"You loved me even then?"

"Even then!"

"Papa will be so surprised."

"I think not."

"Does he know?"

"Not what you have promised me, my sweet! But he must have guessed my wishes. He is not quite so blind to his daughter's charms as a certain little lady of my acquaintance—who, of course, must be nameless."

"Lord Carlyon!"

"I mean you," he said, laughing. "I am not going to answer any questions which begin like that. Don't you know my name, dear?"

"Yes," she whispered.

"Then never let me hear Lord Carlyon from your lips. Well, May, I am waiting."

"What for?"

"You were going to say something."

"Geoffrey," and the word came in almost a whisper, "do you think your mother will like me?"

"She won't be able to help it!"

The clock struck six dinner was at half-past. Sir John must have returned long ago. When they reached the house May sped away to her own room, leaving Geoffrey to enlighten her father. It proved no very difficult task. Sir John shook the young viscount warmly by the hand.

"If May wishes it, I can say nothing; only, remember, she has never known a sorrow. Promise me to make her happy."

"It shall be the object of my life," returned Lord Carlyon. And then he began to press for an early marriage. To his surprise Sir John offered no opposition; he even said he disapproved of long engagements. He told the viscount he had always meant to give his daughter a hundred thousand pounds on her wedding-day, and that whenever he died everything except the entailed property must come to her. Never surely had father-in-law elected himself more amiable!

Geoffrey felt exultant; and when May came into the drawing-room she noted with delight that there was no cloud on either of the faces she so dearly loved.

"Then all your vows of never leaving me are faithless, childie," said Sir John, fondly; "and it seems I am to give you away."

"If you please, papa!" said May, demurely.

"If I please!" and he half sighed; "there, Lord Carlyon, I trust you with my dearest treasure."

All this was settled in the first days of September, but, in spite of the entreaties of Lord Carlyon, and the amiability of Sir John, it was found impossible for the marriage to take place before December.

Of course the news had to be written to the baronet's only sister, Lady Merton, who had always (he said) filled a mother's place to May.

This lady declared three months was the shortest possible time in which a house worthy of a viscountess could be prepared; and to enforce her verdict she started off for Staines at once,

when she reduced the three conspirators, as she called them, to passive obedience.

"I may as well stay until it is all over," she said to May; "it will be much less embarrassing for you. While you were not engaged it did not matter Lord Carlyon haunting the house, even though you had no chaperon; but now everything is quite different. Besides, London is very dreary at this time of the year, and as I should have to come backwards and forwards perpetually about your *trousseau* it will really be much less trouble to me to stay here."

Put in this manner May could hardly refuse to receive the self-invited guest; but there had never been much sympathy between her and her aunt, and she would certainly have preferred to spend the last days of her maiden life unfettered by Lady Merton's supervision.

To Sir John, however, the offer seemed a positive relief, and Lord Carlyon was far too much a man of the world not to see the fitness of the widow's presence.

May found herself in the minority, so she hid her private misery, and did her best to make her aunt's visit agreeable.

If it was trying to be called on at any hour of the day to act as a lay model on which could be displayed all the triumphs of the milliner's and dressmaker's art, at least the sacrifice was for her own benefit, and not for Lady Merton's, so she had no just cause for complaint.

Often through the sweet, lingering days of that autumn the girl found herself wishing vaguely for the young mother whose life had ended so soon after her own began; never had May felt her loss so keenly as now.

Sir John, in his tenderness, had indeed filled the place of both parents; but at this crisis of her life there was a want he could not supply, that Lady Merton could not understand; only then did May realize what it was to be motherless.

It came on her then with a strange pang, how little—how very little she knew of her mother!

Sir John had never cared to speak much of his wife, and until now May had been well content to respect his silence; but now she longed with an unutterable yearning to know something of her mother, who, after barely one brief year of wedded happiness, had been borne to her grave in the family vault.

"Papa," she said one day, when Lady Merton by chance allowed them one of those *tête-à-têtes* which were becoming so rare and precious, "I want you to tell me something about my mother."

Sir John sighed.

"She was like you, my child—only more beautiful."

"You have never told me anything about her, papa—where you met her, or if you had known her long; you never speak of her."

"The subject is too painful, May; rest content with knowing that we loved each other tenderly, and we were engaged a shorter time even than you contemplate—less than a month."

"And had she no relations, papa?"

"None were at her wedding."

"I thought she might have had some nieces, perhaps, and I wanted to know if they might be my bridesmaids! I have so few relations. Papa, only fancy, you and Aunt Merton are the only two I have in the world!"

"You will have your husband," said Sir John, tenderly; "and May, my darling, we have been very happy together without relations."

"Very!" she answered.

And day by day the preparations advanced; the settlements were prepared for signature; the wonderful *trousseau* was almost complete. Lady Merton busied herself with writing a list of the wedding guests—most of them her own special friends—since neither bride nor groom seemed to have many with which to eke out the number.

"If I only had some cousin!" said May, dejectedly. "Fancy having six bridesmaids you have never seen!"

"I wish I had a daughter or two to oblige you," said Lady Merton, pleasantly.

"I wish mamma had left me some cousins; it seems so strange she had no relations."

Lady Merton stared at her.

"No relations!"

"I understand papa so the other day."

"I dare say he's right; he ought to know best. But I thought your mother had a sister!"

"Do you remember, mamma, Aunt Merton?"

"I never saw her"—stifly.

"Weren't you at the wedding?"

"No one was there—it was a runaway match." May opened her eyes.

"You had better ask no questions," said her aunt, not unkindly. "Believe me, child, you would hear nothing but what must make you sorry."

And May turned away with a new load at her heart.

CHAPTER III.

NOVEMBER was nearly over, but the last days of the gloomy month lingered with a laggard step.

The eighth of December was to see May Graham Viscountess Carlyon; and barely a fortnight remained of her maiden life when Geoffrey went into Yorkshire on business, and with his departure a fixed sadness seemed to settle on Meadow-view and its inhabitants.

Lady Merton scolded her niece affectionately for her extreme dejection at the separation from her lover.

Sir John watched his darling anxiously; he looked very grave and careworn in these December days.

"You are quite happy, May; your heart is really in this affair!"

"My whole heart is Geoffrey's—except what is yours," she answered sweetly. "Ours will be what the world laughs at—a match for love's sake only!"

"Heaven grant it!" said Sir John, solemnly.

"Really your father seems as infatuated with Lord Carlyon as you can be, May," said Lady Merton, a little impatiently, one day when, Sir John being detained at the bank, she and her niece dined alone in the cosy, brightly-lighted dining-room.

"Yes," said May; "papa is very fond of Geoffrey. I am glad of it; I never could have married anyone he did not like."

"Do you mean that?" curiously.

"Yes, I think so, aunt; papa and I have been just all the world to each other. Even with Geoffrey I could not live without papa's love!"

She had hardly finished speaking when a servant entered and addressed himself to Lady Merton.

"Mr. Ward is here, my lady, and begs to see you."

Mr. Ward was one of Sir John's most trusted clerks.

May started up with a sudden cry.

"Something is the matter! Papa would never send Mr. Ward here if he were coming home himself in an hour or two!"

Before they could prevent her, before Lady Merton had well understood her fears, she was in the hall. There stood the old man whom she had known from her baby days, a great sadness in his face; for the first time in her life he greeted her without a kindly smile.

"Papa!" almost gasped May, more alarmed than ever at the old clerk's silent despair.

"He is very ill, Miss May; your aunt—"

"You do not want her," cried the girl, wildly. "It is for me you have brought a message. Oh! tell me quickly what it is!"

Lady Merton was with them in time to hear the request.

"You had better tell her," she said, quietly; "she is too anxious to bear suspense. Has anything happened to my brother?"

And then, in an cautious a manner as he could, the old clerk broke to them that Sir John had been seized with sudden illness and was then lying in his own room at the bank, whence the doctor declared it to be impossible to remove him.

"The master had bad news, I think," said the old clerk, sadly—"a telegram or something. Mr. Mortimer went in and found him, senseless, hold-

ing it in his hand. He has only spoken once since; to ask for Miss May."

"I will go at once," said the girl; "no one in all the world shall keep me from him!"

No one tried. Lady Merton, with tender care, herself wrapped the girl in her rich, fur-lined cloak, and whispered words of comfort.

"I can think of nothing!" moaned the poor child. "Oh! aunt, do not stop me!" as Lady Merton tried to press a glass of wine on her.

"Every moment seems an eternity until I am at his side."

So the old clerk led her down the steps and placed her in the cab waiting to take them to the station. With rare delicacy of feeling he uttered no word, made no attempt at sympathy all through that cold winter's journey, only when they had left the train and were driving rapidly to Lombard-street he said, gently,

"Sir John may be much better, Miss May; the doctors said everything would depend upon the next few hours."

"When did you leave him?"

"At five; there was an unlucky delay. I had to wait at Waterloo for a train."

"It is ten now," she said, wistfully. "Do you think—"

He understood the unfinished sentence.

"I feel sure you will be in time."

In time! Only that morning she had parted from her father in health and strength; now she must be thankful she was "in time" to see him alive once more. What a cruel mockery it seemed!

A little knot of people were gathered in the outer room. She recognized Mr. Mortimer and one or two others, but she took no notice of them. Unfastening the silver clasp of her cloak she let it fall disregarded to the ground. She tossed her hat on to a chair, and then she followed Mr. Ward into what had been Sir John's private room.

He was lying on the sofa, and, for an instant, his daughter forgot everything but him. Falling on her knees beside the couch she took his hand in hers. Little she recked that a strange gentleman was staring at her in unmixed surprise. Little she remembered how out of place she must look there in her evening dress, the bracelets on her arms, the flowers yet in her soft, brown hair.

"Papa, oh! father, best beloved, speak to me! Papa, do not go away and leave your May alone in this bleak world; I cannot bear it!"

At sound of that loved voice the dying man opened his eyes. He half raised himself upon his pillow.

She bent over him and kissed him.

"It is I, May!"

"My child! my Marion's child! Forgive me, May. I never thought to bring you this sorrow!"

"Forgive you!" she cried, passionately. "What can I have to forgive? You have been the best and tenderest of fathers to me. You have made my days a dream of happiness."

He hardly seemed to hear her.

"It has come, May, what I so dreaded—what I would have given my whole life to save you from!"

"Nothing matters, dear, so that I have you."

He sighed.

"You have been used to luxury, and now we are penniless. Oh! May, how will you bear it?"

"Money is not everything," answered the girl, believing him delirious, yet humouring his fancy. "Besides, I shall have you—and Geoffrey."

"Ah! he will protect you, and he will marry you for love's sake only. You will be safe, and I can meet your mother!"

His head fell back; a deep silence followed, only May did not understand its meaning. At last she felt a hand laid upon her shoulder.

"You must come away now."

The speaker was a man about thirty-five years of age—a grave, earnest face, with strongly-marked features, large, thoughtful grey eyes, and dark hair not free from silver threads.

"You must come away now."

"I cannot!" said May, angrily. "I must stay with him; he may wake and want me."

"He will not want you."

"I am all he has; let me stay with him."

The hand kept its hold upon her arm; there was a ring of deep pity in his voice.

"Heaven help you, Miss Graham! don't you understand me! Sir John can never want you again; he is beyond the need of all human love!"

She did not weep; she uttered no moan; her eyes were dry and fearless—they glittered with a strange unnatural sparkle as she uttered the one word,—

"Dead!"

Keith Foster did not misunderstand her; he knew, in spite of her awful calm, she was suffering keenly. Very gently he raised her from the ground and led her into the next room. It was quite empty now.

As soon as the news of Sir John's death had gone forth the watchers there had departed.

Keith placed May in a large easy chair, mixed a glass of brandy-and-water and brought it to her.

"Drink this."

"I cannot."

"You must!" he said, firmly; "for his sake, you must keep up your strength."

"He does not need me now; you said so."

"But you would not like to cross his wishes; you know what they would have been."

She drained the glass and put it on the table.

"That is better. Now who shall I send for to be with you? you cannot stay here alone."

"No one."

"Mrs. Mortimer!"

For the Mortimers lived at Kensington—no impossible distance it seemed to Keith Foster.

May shuddered.

"I had rather be alone."

"Then you must let me take you home."

She made no reply. He took up a "Bradshaw."

"We shall just catch the last train for Staines. Perhaps, after all, it is better you should be at home with your own friends."

At last she forced her trembling lips to do her will.

"What was it?" she gasped. "What killed him—he left me this morning well and strong, and now—"

"It was the heart."

"And is it true that he had bad news?"

He hesitated; but she must hear it soon; better perhaps that he should break it to her.

"I believe it has been a time of great anxiety at the bank. Mr. Mortimer has been for hours examining papers and things; he told me just now that they must suspend payment to-morrow."

"Then the failure and disgrace have killed my father!"

"The failure, perhaps—not the disgrace, for none could attach to Sir John. I have known him for ten years, and I should never have linked his name with such a word."

He wrapped her in her cloak, and led her down the stairs; but through all her agony of suppressed grief May felt one thing keenly—all his kindness, all his courtesy were shown for her father's sake.

There was something even in his manner, kind though it was, which showed this; in truth, Keith Foster was judging May somewhat harshly; he had attended Sir John for years.

Again and again he had urged on him to retire from business cares and anxieties, and had always been met with the answer,—

"He must go on a few years longer for his daughter's sake!"

And now, when he lay dying, his one wish to see this daughter, she only arrived after long delay (he never thought of how Mr. Ward had been detained waiting for trains) in an attire more suited for a ball than a sick-room.

Keith had his own ideal of womanhood—gentle, soothing, harmonious. Certainly May,

with her impulsive ways, her quick, impetuous utterances fell far short of it.

He took every care for her comfort, and by means of a silver key secured a private compartment; but he was certainly not prepared to see May's brown eyes close, and to find, by her calm, regular breathing, she had fallen asleep five minutes after the train left Waterloo.

"Heartless creature!" he muttered.

Poor child! she was not heartless, only so utterly worn out with grief and excitement that she was completely prostrate.

He watched her closely as he sat opposite, and then drew the curtains carefully to screen her from the draught.

What a child she looked as she leant back—her face flushed, her hair a trifle in disorder. Wonderfully beautiful, he admitted even to himself; he quite understood Lord Carlyon's infatuation.

"Of course he will be true to her," thought Keith, musingly; "men don't give up a girl with such a face as that for any loss of fortune. They may postpone the wedding for three months, but next spring will see her Lady Carlyon."

He took her up in his arms as if she had been a baby when they reached Staines, and placed her on a seat while he went to procure a cab.

Coming back he saw that she still slept on as tranquilly as though she had been in her own bed at home.

"Poor child!" with a sudden softening of his heart towards her; "what will her awakening be like?"

After all he was destined to see; for when they reached Meadowview, and he had carried her to the drawing-room, as he sat talking to Lady Merton—who had hospitably ordered a bed to be prepared for him—with one sudden start she opened her eyes, and sat upright on the sofa.

She saw her aunt, but when Lady Merton would have approached with affectionate sympathy she put out both hands as though to ward her off, and turned to Dr. Foster, with the same question in eye and word.

"Is it quite true?"

He bowed his head.

She rose then, and almost staggered towards the door.

"I had rather be alone," she said, in a dull, listless tone, as her aunt rose to follow her.

"May is an extraordinary girl," said Lady Merton, apologetically, as the door closed on her; "and my poor brother spoilt her terribly. You must make allowances for her, Dr. Foster, if she seems heartless and unfeeling."

To his own surprise he found himself defending May.

"I am sure she is neither," he said, promptly. "There are some natures whom grief drives to take refuge within themselves. When Lord Carlyon returns I doubt not Miss Graham's mood will change."

"I wish they had been married!" sighed Lady Merton; "there is nothing so unlucky as a postponed wedding."

Keith Foster was glad to get away from the loquacious widow. A servant ushered him to a sumptuously-furnished bedroom, and inquired as what hour he would like to breakfast in the morning.

"Eight," returned Keith, thinking of his patients, and forgetting that early rising was probably not among the habits of the late baronet's household.

But early though it was someone was there before him. When he entered the breakfast-room a slight, black-robed figure was there to meet him.

Pale almost as marble, her cheeks wan, her eyes heavy and with dark rings beneath them, May took her place at the head of the table and asked Dr. Foster, in a voice which tried not to tremble, if he preferred tea or coffee.

"You should not have done this," said Keith, gently; "the effort will be too much for you."

"It is nothing. I have to see Mr. Mortimer at nine; he has just sent a message that he will be here then to go into business matters."

"Business matters with you so soon!"

"There is no one else," she said, wearily; "and delay would not make it easier."

"But he ought not to press things on you with such haste!"

She shuddered.

"I shall manage to go through with it, somehow."

"And he is an old friend, perhaps?"

"I have known him all my life; but he is not a friend. I have no friends, Dr. Foster."

"No friends!"

"I went out very little, and the people who came to dine with us were not exactly friends, you see. While we had each other we wanted no one else."

"Will you allow me to telegraph for Lord Carlyon?"

"He is in Yorkshire, but I hardly know where. He is travelling from place to place; I expect him home to-morrow."

"Can I do anything for you?" he urged, impelled to make the offer by pity for the dead father, whose darling she had been. "I don't think, as matters stand, you ought to see Mr. Mortimer alone, unless you have implicit confidence in him."

She hesitated.

"I have always heard a doctor's time was so valuable!"

"A few hours will make no difference. I am fortunate in having an able assistant."

So he stayed.

"Fool that I am!" he thought, as he followed May to the library. "Here I am, sacrificing patients, money, and time to a girl I never saw till yesterday, whom I probably shall never see again—a girl whom a few months will make a peeress, and who will then probably cut me off if she meets me in the street. She is just the opposite to all my notions of a true woman's attributes, and yet her face haunts me; yet I feel myself wishing all kinds of foolish absurdities and cherishing a cordial antipathy to Lord Carlyon."

But an hour later he was glad he had stayed. All the pure-pride in Mr. Mortimer's nature came out at this interview. Of true gratitude, of real regard towards the benefactor who advanced him from a clerk to a partner, he had none, since his first words were to cast blame on Sir John for the want of foresight which had brought about their disasters. The bank must close at once. When everything has been wound up there would be just twenty shillings in the pound for the creditors.

"This place and Grahamsville can't be touched," he said, brusquely; "they go to the new heir, but every penny that can be separated from the estates will be needed for the creditors. Your portion, that we heard so much about, will be *nil*, Miss Graham—absolutely *nil*."

In these words the self-made man paid off the grudge he had always felt towards May for being more beautiful and attractive—*ay!* and ten times more refined—than his own daughter. He had never forgiven her for not inviting them on long visits to Meadowview, and receiving them as bosom friends. He thought he had his revenge now.

Keith's blood boiled.

"I presume the same fate awaits your own possessions?" he said, coldly; "the ruin of one partner necessarily involves that of the other."

"Well, it's bad enough for me, but not so black as that! Unlike our late friend, I am a prudent man, doctor. I have settled my house in Kensington on my wife, and a snug little income along with it. I see my way pretty clearly to a managership; and so, thanks to my caution, I shall lose very little by the folly—I won't call it by a harsher name—of my late partner."

May stood up with flashing eyes.

"At least spare his memory from insult!" she cried. "He never did you anything but good. Why should you speak against him now?"

"I shall choose my own manner of speaking," retorted Mr. Mortimer; "and certainly not alter it at the bidding of the penniless daughter of a

bankrupt. You'll have to change your manners with your fortunes I reckon, Miss Graham."

"Be silent!" thundered Keith, almost beside himself with fury; "if you have no compassion for the orphan of him you called your friend at least respect the future Viscountess Carlyon!"

"That match will soon be off," said Mortimer, with a sneer; "everyone knows Carlyon only wanted her money to pay off the mortgages on his property. I should say the chance of being his viscountess would soon be in the market again, and Miss Graham were glad to keep herself by earning an honest penny. I believe Mrs. Mortimer is looking out for a nursery governess for our two youngest. Perhaps the post would suit my young lady if it isn't filled up; it's quite good enough for a linendrapier's niece."

He could not speak another word. Keith took him by the shoulders and fairly turned him out of the room. Meeting a footman he delivered the struggling banker to his charge.

"See this person off the premises!"

He tried to find Lady Merton, but heard she was still in her own room.

He went back to the library, where May still sat, motionless, in the chair where he had left her.

"Miss Graham," began Keith, courteously; "you must not let the insolent taunts of a man like that trouble you for an instant. I doubt not that by to-morrow Lord Carlyon will be here himself to refute such calumnies."

"Do you think it is true?"

"I am sure it was false. I am a blunt man and little used to compliments, but I am quite certain any man you deigned to favour would woo you for love's sake only."

She shuddered.

"You heard what he said?"

Keith bowed.

"Is it true? Am I a linendrapier's niece?"

He shook his head.

"You are your father's daughter; and to my mind, Miss Graham, that is a title of honour. And now I am going to leave you. I am quite sure you will soon have abler aid than mine; yet let me assure you that if through any delay in Lord Carlyon's return you need someone to act for you I can have no greater pleasure than to serve you."

To his surprise she took his hand and pressed her lips to it with almost a child's grace.

"Heaven bless you, Dr. Foster!" she said, simply. "Good-bye!"

And all that day—*ay*, and through many that followed it, too—the memory of this kiss haunted the young physician, following him in his visits to patients, and never leaving him even in his hours of hard-won rest. He thought of May constantly, and from the bottom of his heart he hoped Lord Carlyon would prove himself worthy of her love.

He who never looked at such things took to studying the personal news in the papers, and was rewarded, two days later, by seeing the announcement that Lord Carlyon had returned from Yorkshire, and was staying at his chambers in Clarges-street.

"Thank Heaven!" said Keith, speaking aloud, unconsciously, in his earnestness; "then that poor child has someone to fight her battles."

CHAPTER IV.

A HANDSOME house in Clapham, replete with every comfort; a pleasant breakfast-table with three persons sitting around it—father, mother, and daughter.

Charles Anderson called himself a tradesman; his name was over a large establishment in Oxford-street, and some fifty or sixty assistants received their salary from him.

But he himself bore little trace of the shop—a handsome, kindly-looking gentleman, of middle age, with a cheerful face and a high, intellectual forehead; a good classical scholar, well versed in art and science, possessing a strong taste for literature, and an innate refinement.

Had Sir John Graham ever cared to associate with his brother-in-law he would soon have

forgotten what he considered the gulf in their social positions ; but he had never so cared.

Passionate love had made him bury his prejudices sufficiently to marry the linen-draper's sister, but he cut her off entirely from her kindred.

Not even when she was dying would he summon them to her side ; and when hearing of Lady Graham's early death Mrs. Anderson herself wrote to the baronet begging to have the care of her little motherless niece, at least for the first few years, when social status could make no difference to her ; the letter was never even answered.

Some women would have resented the slight. Mrs. Anderson only sorrowed over it ; she had loved her pretty little sister-in-law very dearly, and would fain have ministered to her child.

She herself was a clergyman's daughter, and she had married her husband because she cared for him, not for the comforts his prosperous position afforded her.

Fortune favoured the well-matched couple as years rolled on. Their daughter bid fair to be an heiress, and many circles as high as Sir John Graham's own would have welcomed the Andersons, had they cared to live in the whirl of constant society ; as it was they did not care, but preferred their old life with its simple pleasures and its old, tried friends.

"Something is the matter," said Mrs. Anderson quietly. "Charles, you have hardly spoken this morning."

"I have heard some bad news," and he touched a letter near his plate.

"What has happened ?"

"Sir John Graham is dead—died suddenly last Monday. The bank has stopped payment, and when everyone is paid that poor child won't have a penny in the world after being brought up to think herself an heiress."

His wife and daughter listened in consternation. They had believed Sir John almost a millionaire ; they could hardly realize the news.

"It will postpone May's marriage," said Mrs. Anderson, at last. "Poor child ! How lonely she must be."

The Andersons had received no official intimation of the grand match their young relative was to form ; but, in common with the general public, they had seen the announcement of Lord Carlyon's engagement in the society papers.

"How did you hear it ?" asked Marion. "Surely May never wrote to you herself, papa ?"

"I don't suppose May even knows of our existence, dear. The letter is from her aunt, Lady Merton ; and I have not told you the worst—the engagement is broken off entirely."

"Broken off !" echoed his listeners, in disbelief.

"Lord Carlyon declares he is perfectly unable to keep a portionless wife. I should like to have the handling of him—deserting a girl whose only parent is barely cold in his grave."

"And what is May going to do ?" cried Marion. "Oh ! mamma, I wish she might come here."

Mr. Anderson looked at his wife.

"Lady Merton seems to me to care very little what becomes of her niece so that she has not to support her herself. She tells me expressly, three times over, her income is only sufficient for her own necessities ; and then adds she writes to me, unknown to May, to inquire if I am willing to do anything towards the support of my only sister's child."

A long silence followed. Marion hardly liked to urge her request again ; at twenty-two she understood quite well the reasons which had made her cousin a stranger to them. To have a young lady living in their house who looked down on them as being of another sphere would hardly be pleasant.

"I don't like the letter," said Mrs. Anderson, as she returned it to her husband. "I fancy Lady Merton would give May to understand she provided for her a home, and at the same time like you to pay for it. I think the only thing is for us to propose for the poor girl to come and live with us. After all, Marion's child cannot be entirely unlovable."

The offer was made so promptly that the very

next day Lady Merton communicated it to her niece, and if she entirely misrepresented the spirit of Mr. Anderson's letter it must be said in excuse that he had defeated her wishes.

She had been at the pains to ascertain that he was an extremely rich man, with only one child ; and she had planned, if he offered to allow May two or three hundred a year (which she heard he was well able to do) quietly to pocket the money as a pleasant addition to her own income, and in return, therefore, to allow her niece to share her home, and bestow upon her a very modest sum for dress and pocket-money.

My lady had arranged it all beautifully. She was going to win May's eternal gratitude at Mr. Anderson's expense.

She never denied that she had written to him.

"He has scraped together a little money, and I dare say for a linendraper he is fairly well off."

May shuddered.

"I wish you had not written to him ; I would rather starve than take his money."

"You can't starve, and he gives you no chance of taking his money. All your very generous kinsman offers you a share of his home. I dare say they'll put you in the attic."

"I shall refuse ; something will turn up—some way of earning my own livelihood."

"And till it does ?"

"You will let me stay with you."

"I am desolate to refuse you, dear ; but I am due at Lady Masterton's next week, and from her house I start on a long round of visits."

May understood ; she said nothing. It was a case where words would have been thrown away.

"I wonder if Sir Cecil would let me stay here !"

"May !" and if ever pious indignation sounded in a woman's voice it sounded in my lady's then.

"If he stays abroad he must have a house-keeper ; and who could take such care of the dear old place as I ?"

"You must be mad ; it would be like asking him to marry you. You are positively indecent, May !"

May rose with a sigh. Only a week ago she had had an adoring father and a devoted lover. Next Thursday was to have seen her an English peeress ; and now she stood utterly alone, doubtful how to procure a shelter and food to prolong the life she had ceased to value.

"Shall I write and tell the linendraper you accept his generous proposal ?"

"I will tell you when I come back, I am going to London."

"Indeed !"

"I am going to consult a friend. Don't look at me like that, Aunt Merton ; it is the truth."

Two hours later, a slight, girlish figure, dressed in deepest mourning, stood before the door of the apartments where Keith Foster received his patients.

It was nearly three o'clock ; the young physician's visiting hours were over, and the page made a little difficulty about admitting May. He was still remonstrating that his master was just going out when Keith himself appeared.

His heart throbbed as he recognized his visitor. He said nothing to the page—no reproof or scolding ; but he took May's hand, and led her gently through the outer rooms to his own private one.

He gave her an easy chair, poked the fire into a cheerful blaze, and then began, in a voice he strove to make careless,—

"Why did you not send for me ? I would have come directly. This is too long a journey for you to take alone."

What had become of his philosophy, his attachment to his ideal woman ! All had vanished at sight of May's face.

"I could not trouble you to do that ; indeed I ought not to take up your time now, I have no right ; but you said once you would help me."

"I would help you with heart and will," he answered. "As to right, you have the strongest right in the world to any aid. I can give you, since I begged you to ask for it."

They sat on in silence ; she hardly knew how to begin, he could not find words.

"I hope you have not come to me professionally," he said at last. "Forgive me, Miss Graham, but you are looking very far from well."

"I am perfectly well," she said, in a weary, sorrow-laden voice. "Sometimes I wish I wasn't ; but the grief that has robbed my life of happiness seems powerless to impair my health."

"And you will be glad some day that it was so. Now, tell me, how can I help you ?"

"Do you remember that morning at Staines ?"

"Perfectly."

"And Mr. Mortimer's visit—his cruel sneers ?"

"Yes."

"Dr. Foster, they have all come true. I, who a few days ago thought myself an heiress, have come here to-day to ask you to tell me how I can earn my own living."

She had taken off her gloves, and stretched her hands over the ruddy flames to warm them. He saw then that the diamond engagement ring was missing.

He understood it all ; and even in the midst of his pity for her he could not help one selfish throb of joy—at least she was free.

"I will help you as gladly—as freely as if you were my sister ; only I am full of indignation. How could anyone in his senses—"

"Hush !" said May, gently ; "abusing him won't alter things. It is better so than if he had married me and the ruin come afterwards. Think what my life would have been then !"

"And you will not make your home with Lady Merton ?"

"I cannot. The only refuge offered me is at Clapham with my uncle the linendraper."

What it cost her pride to utter these words no tongue can tell, but Keith understood the effort. He said gravely,—

"I have known one linendraper whom I should consider it an honour to count kindred with ; let us hope your uncle resembles him. Miss Graham, you asked me for advice. Why not go to him and make the trial ? you may be happier than you expect."

"I should never be happy living on a tradesman's charity. I would a hundred times rather work, even if I sewed my fingers to the bone."

"You are so young," he said, wistfully ; "so young and gentle ; you are not fit to struggle with this rough, cold world, Miss Graham."

"But if I must !"

"I would still urge you to try Clapham ; at least, for time—only a little time."

"But the difficulty would be the same. I can't go on living a pensioner on my uncle's charity. Why, I might live to be sixty !"

"Yes."

"And"—with flaming cheeks—"he might grow to grudge me my expenses ; he might want me to serve in his shop !"

Keith looked into the fire. Was there the ghost of a chance for him. Should he risk all, and tell her of his wishes ?

"There is something I should like to suggest," he began, nervously—he who had never known what hesitation meant ; "only I am afraid you would be angry ; you might be vexed."

"Anything would be better than Clapham," said May, graciously. "Perhaps—as a bright thought struck her—"perhaps you have some children, and want a governess for them. I never taught anyone in my life, you know ; but I would do my very best if only your wife would try me."

She turned to him with bright, eager face—Keith Foster caught her hand in his.

"May, I know the risk I run, the danger I encounter of losing your friendship, but I will have it all. Will you be my wife ?"

"Your wife !" she cried.

"I have loved you since our first meeting. I know I am not worthy of you ; but, indeed, my darling, I could make you happy ; I am sure of it if only you would let me try. I am not a poor man ; I can provide an easy home for my wife ; and if love can guard you from it you shall never know a sorrow."

She stood still, motionless, with a sad look in

her beautiful brown eyes ; she was not angry, not indignant, only unutterably pained.

"I am very sorry," and she released her hand ; "I am sure you mean generously, but it cannot be!"

"Cannot! Oh! May."

"Cannot. What opinion would you have of me, if I could accept your name just to free myself from my difficulties! You know that a week ago I was engaged to another man, that but for a freak of fortune I should be his wife. How can you think I would listen to another too?"

"Forgive me!" he pleaded ; "forgive me!"

"I have nothing to forgive ; you have been all kindness, all generosity, only you have robbed me of the only friend I had."

"And do you think I can cease to be your friend because you have denied my presumptuous wishes? You must have a poor opinion of me."

"I think you are the noblest man I ever met," she said, raising her big brown eyes to meet his, in fearless trust ; "only I cannot take such a sacrifice, I dare not. You would find I am not all you think—I am nothing but a weary, heart-broken girl, and you would weary of your generosity in a month."

"Never!"

"I think so. Well, I shall go to Clapham. I do not know why, but you seem to put my uncle's conduct in quite a different light to Lady Merton. Dr. Foster, will you let me thank you for all! And if we never meet again, don't think so hardly of me."

"I am sure we shall meet again some day," he answered, with a smile of peculiar brightness ; "and I could never think hardly of you under any circumstances. Remember, if ever you want a friend, send for me ; I shall build no hopes on such a simple act. I will not trouble you with my folly again."

And those words rang sadly in her ears as she returned to Staines. It might be folly. Of course, she could not take advantage of his momentary infatuation.

Her heart had been given, she thought, to Geoffrey Carlyon ; he had proved himself false, and now it was her own again. She had no regrets for Geoffrey ; from the moment she knew his treachery her love for him died.

Strange as it may seem, when she had formally signified to Lady Merton her acceptance of the linendraper's proposal and retired to her own room, her tears—and very bitter ones they were—were not for Viscount Carlyon, not for her lost father, or ruined prospects, but for the man who had promised never again to trouble her with his folly—the man who had woosed her for love only.

CHAPTER V.

"I HAVE said you would be at Clapham to-morrow afternoon," observed Lady Merton to her niece. "I hope, May, things will turn out better than you expect."

"They can't turn out worse," answered her niece, with a kind of hopeless sadness, which touched her ladyship, worldly-minded woman though she was.

"After all the linendraper may have made money, and those kind of people generally adore rank ; they may be tolerably generous to you for the sake of entertaining a Baronet's child."

May shook her head.

"Well, write to me sometimes, child. I wish I could have kept you with me. After all it would only have been for a little while ; with your face you are not likely to remain May Graham long."

The maid packed her young lady's possessions, and wept bitterly when she heard she was not to accompany her to Clapham.

May soothed her kindly—she was touched at the girl's affection.

"You'll let me come and see you sometimes, miss!" pleaded the faithful Mary ; "mother lives at Kensington, and it ain't no way from there to Clapham."

"I will send you my address," said May, only

then recalled to the fact that she had never even heard the name of her uncle's house.

"Make a good luncheon, my dear," said her aunt, affectionately, the next day ; "I expect they dine early at Clapham, and there will be nothing more extensive waiting for you than family tea."

"You told them I was coming to day!"

"Yes! I said Thursday afternoon."

Miss Graham reached Waterloo at about four o'clock, and drove off with her possessions in a cab. It never occurred to her that either Clapham Junction or Vauxhall-station would have been nearer her destination.

She gave the driver the address with a shiver of apprehension, lest it should turn out after all that her uncle resided over his shop. "Richmond House, Clapham Common" sounded sweet, but she was quite prepared to find it an emporium of cheap and second-rate drapery.

A long drive—a very long drive it seemed to May—and then, in the gathering darkness, the cab stopped before a large detached house standing in a pleasant garden. The man pushed open the gate, and drove on to the door.

"It can't be here!" said May, nervously ; "there must be some mistake."

"This is Richmond House, miss."

"Then they are rich and stuck up," decided May. "It will be worse even than the shop. How they will despise my poverty!"

A page opened the door, and a neat maid-servant came forward to receive the young lady.

"My mistress and Miss Marion have gone to meet you, miss ; they started two hours ago."

"May was pleased in spite of herself at this mark of attention, and continued to express her regret.

"Will you go to your own room, miss?" asked the servant, respectfully ; "or shall I show you the way to the drawing-room?"

May elected to go to her own room, wondering if it would prove the attic she had expected ; but when she followed the maid upstairs she found that the house seemed built entirely on two floors, for there seemed no means of ascending higher.

At the end of the landing her guide opened a door and disclosed a very pretty bedroom, where a bright fire burnt cheerfully ; communicating with it was another room fitted up as a little study.

Martha lighted the gas, and May had time to see that the furniture was good, and in excellent taste.

"I will have your luggage brought up at once, miss. Shall I send anyone to help you unpack?"

May declined. A penniless dependent must not give too much trouble, she decided. It was a pleasant task to take out her own possessions and scatter them about. It might have sad recollections, but it gave the room a homelike air.

She was in the thick of it when a knock sounded at the door.

"Come in!" she cried, quickly.

There entered a girl three or four years her senior, with a fair, thoughtful face. She was dressed in a warm, dark-coloured cashmere trimmed with velvet, and May's first idea was that, if her attire came from "the shop," that establishment must be far superior to her imagined idea.

The girl advanced with outstretched hand, but, to May's amazement, her cousin seemed far the more nervous of the two.

"I am so sorry we were out," began Marion, gently ; "it must have seemed so unkind, but we went to meet you. We made sure you would come to Vauxhall."

"It was very kind of you," said May, mechanically.

Marion felt chilled.

"Will you come and see mamma? she is waiting tea for us."

May followed her in perfect silence down-stairs to the drawing-room. Here, on a dainty-looking tea-table, stood a tray of silver and china, and a sweet-faced woman, with eyes like Marion's, sat before it. She rose as the girls entered.

"My dear!" she said to May, giving her the kiss Marion had been too shy to offer ; "I am

very glad to see you. I know it must be hard for you to come among strangers, but we will do all we can to make you feel at home."

"Thank you."

But her voice had a different ring now ; she took the seat they offered her, and Mrs. Anderson at least could see that the brown eyes were full of tears.

"Did you leave Lady Merton well?" she asked, more for the sake of conversation than from interest.

"Perfectly, thank you."

"It must have been a great grief for her to part from you."

"I think not," with a strange smile. "I think Aunt Merton was only afraid of having to keep me."

Mrs. Anderson could have cried at the bitterness of the voice.

"You must let us know your tastes, May," she said, kindly. "It is hard for you to come to strangers at such a time of trouble, but I hope we shall not seem strangers to you long."

"I wonder you don't hate me!" exclaimed May.

"Hate you!" repeated Marion, in amazement. "Why?"

"I was kept aloof from you all my life ; I only come now I am in trouble, like a pauper, to be a dependent on your charity!"

The girl was struggling with her tears. Marion's own eyes were not dry ; she understood all the proud, sensitive nature must be suffering.

"Don't think of that, dear!" returned Mrs. Anderson ; "it may have hurt us both a little that our sister's only child was a stranger to us. But, believe me, we are both glad to have you here now, and we look on you as a second daughter."

And that evening was only an earnest of the future. When May had seen her uncle her fears were set at rest.

Life at Clapham might be different from her lonely day-dreams at Staines, but at least it was a refined and intellectual family among whom she found herself.

At least she received from one and all a tender consideration which could not have been increased had she been the heiress she once believed herself.

And as the first weeks of the new year wore on she grew to feel as if she were at home, grew to love the Andersons as she had never been able to love her aunt, Lady Merton.

"Keep the — Review from May," said Mr. Anderson one evening to his wife and daughter, as they sat waiting for their guest ; a strange thrill of compassion in his voice.

"What is it, papa?"

"Lord Carlyon's marriage."

"Married!" gasped Marion. "Why, it is not three months ago since he was engaged to May!"

"He has married the eldest Miss Mortimer. There must have been strange treachery somewhere, for poor Graham to die penniless and his partner to remain a rich man."

"May never mentions the Mortimers."

"Nor Lord Carlyon," put in Marion. "Papa, don't you wonder he could have deserted her ; she is so sweet and beautiful!"

"I think she will live yet to be thankful for the poverty which saved her from being the victim of a mercenary marriage."

"Who talks of marriage!" cried May, coming in, looking wonderfully attractive in her evening dress of silk and crêpe. "Oh! there is the — Review, and I can see the victims for myself!"

It was too late to prevent her ; she had taken up the paper. What she felt they never knew, only when she laid it down they saw that her face was very grave and pale. All through that evening she lacked her usual animation ; she was more like the silent May who had come among them first.

"An old friend of mine is coming to dinner to-morrow," announced Mr. Anderson. "Guess who it is! Marion will be delighted."

A strange light came into his daughter's face.

"Dr. Foster!"

"Right, May!" turning to his niece, "I know you do not care for general society yet, but you will not mind meeting an old friend of mine."

"No."

And all the while she was wondering if he were Marion's lover, and how she could bear to see him at her cousin's side. She knew the truth now; her heart had been caught in the rebound. She might have given her girlhood's preference, her first love, to Geoffrey Carlyon; but her life's devotion, her heart's best passion was Keith's.

She remembered now his remark respecting linendrapers. Of course, Mr. Anderson was the one exception he named. Well, if he had forgotten her she would show him she could forget too; and so, cold and beautiful as an ice queen, our little wayward heroine went downstairs to meet the man who had once offered to marry her for love only.

He never alluded to their former meeting; only, when Mrs. Anderson introduced them he bowed low over her hand, and whispered, "I little thought to find you here." He hardly spoke to her again. He had a great deal to say to Mr. and Mrs. Anderson, and once or twice May caught Marion's eyes fixed on him almost beseechingly. One thing was evident—Miss Anderson had no common interest in the same doctor.

After that he came again and again, until they grew to look for him two or three times a-week. No engagement was announced, but May felt persuaded he came there for Marion's sake. Well, what right had she to complain if the man she had rejected sought consolation elsewhere? and who could make him happier than her gentle cousin?

But May was no heroine of romance—only a wilful girl, with a loving, sensitive heart, and a warm, impetuous nature. Resolved to show Dr. Foster she could forget as entirely as he, she began to treat him with the most frigid courtesy, the most ceremonious formality. She never spoke to him if she could help it; at going and coming she accorded him only a distant bow.

"Have I offended you, Miss Graham?" he asked, one night, when by an accident he found himself alone with her.

"How could you offend me?" she returned, icily.

She was thinking that the last time they had been alone together he had offered her his love. He was wondering what had changed her so since that bright December morning.

"You seem to object to my presence here," he said, gravely. "To grudge me even the welcome I receive from others, and in which you will not join!"

"It does not matter to me."

"Nothing matters to you in which I am concerned. You need not trouble yourself to show it me so often. I quite understand."

"It doesn't matter to you!"

He would not contradict her.

"You don't come here to see me; you come to see my uncle and aunt—and Marion."

"Mr. and Mrs. Anderson have been my friends from my earliest childhood."

"And Marion is something more than a friend!"

"And Marion of course is more than a friend," he agreed.

To his astonishment, May flung down her work and rushed out of the room.

"What can it mean?" he asked himself. "Is her heart so sore for that villain's perfidy she can't bear to hear engagements or love affairs spoken of even yet? Well, Marion's wedding will be a hard trial to her, poor child! Yet she must hear of it soon, for Henry is on his way home, and the affair must come off in May or June."

That same evening May came into her cousin's room. That was no uncommon occurrence. The two often sat up discussing little matters.

"Marion," began May, timidly, "why did you never tell me of your engagement?"

Marion put one arm round her.

"It was only quite settled just after you came to us; and mamma and I both thought it kinder not to mention it. We feared it might remind you of the past."

"But he did not come here directly after I did!"

"He could not come; he wrote. It was a very old affair," blushing—"begun when we were both children. My papa and mamma were so against it on account of his profession, and so we waited and waited until, seeing my whole heart was in it, they gave way, like the indulgent darling they are."

"And you are happy?"

"I am perfectly happy. My dear, it seems selfish to talk of my happiness to you."

May sighed.

"Who told you, dear?"

"Who told me what?"

"About us. Was it mamma?"

"Oh, no! It was Dr. Foster."

"Keith. You must learn to call him by his name, May. Why, he will be a sort of cousin of yours!"

(Continued on page 44.)

out the fire, slowly unrolled the rug she swerved, and swaying back would have fallen, had she not been caught in her husband's arms.

"The fire is out, my darling," said Denis tenderly; "there is no further danger; Beryl look up, speak to me."

But there was no answer, no sound came from her clenched lips; no movement of her face showed that she heard.

The fire had been merciful to the wondrous beauty of her face; it was the lower part of her dress which had first caught light, and so quickly had help come that there was not a blemish on her fair delicate skin, except that one arm, escaping from the loose hanging sleeves of her dressing-gown, was badly scorched.

Denis laid her down on the bed, and, while the maid applied restoratives, he said hoarsely to Mr. Dent,

"I shall send for the doctor at once."

Joseph Dent nodded.

"I would go for him, but your servants know where he lives, and every moment is of consequence."

"They will be quick enough," said Denis sadly; "there is not a man in my stables who would lose an instant if the delay could harm his lady."

The maid, a quiet, sensible woman, came forward with a suggestion.

"Would it not be better to move my lady while she is unconscious, Sir Denis? If she comes to herself here, and sees the wreck the room is in, it will remind her of the fire."

True enough, the beautiful room was indeed a state of wreckage and confusion. Sir Denis felt that the maid was right. The next apartment (once intended for his dressing-room) held a small brass bedstead. It would be better to carry Beryl there and let the maid get her into bed before the doctor came.

He carried his wife in his arms to the smaller room, and leaving her there with Mrs. Curtis and Jane, he went downstairs closely followed by Joseph Dent.

"Don't take on so," said Uncle Joe, to whom the blank despair on Adair's face was almost as terrible as Beryl's unconsciousness; "my dear fellow she has only fainted."

"She will die," said Denis Adair, hoarsely; "die doubting and distrusting me, and I, I love her with all my heart and soul, though I have failed so miserably to make her happy."

Joseph Dent was not a preacher, but his next remark was as true wisdom as the most learned divine could have spoken.

"I shouldn't wonder if this accident were sent to draw you closer together. When two people love each other, Adair, things must come right at last. You and Beryl have drifted a good way apart; perhaps it needed this to bring you back to each other."

"Did she tell you?" asked Denis, hastily; "did she confide in you?"

"My dear fellow, she told me nothing to make me think the breach between you irrevocable; she said nothing that could make you doubt her love."

He had had a brief struggle with himself as to whether he should tell Adair all he knew; but he decided it was better to hold his peace. If there was ever to be full faith and confidence between the wedded pair Adair must hear from his wife's own lips what had first made her doubt him.

"Will he never come?" groaned Denis, thinking of the doctor.

"Your man has not been gone half an hour," said Mr. Dent; "is your doctor a clever man?"

"Yes, and I have known him all my life; Carter is as honest as the day; there's just this comfort, Mr. Dent, he won't attempt to deceive me with false hopes; he won't delude us; if we must lose my darling he will tell us."

"It is almost midnight," said Mr. Dent, looking at his watch, "however this ends, Adair, whether the illness is long or short, you will want help. I should like to telegraph for my wife as soon as the office opens in the morning, and—if your doctor approves—hadn't she better bring a trained nurse with her? I don't suppose you have such a thing in these parts."

"I hate trained nurses," said Adair, almost

BERYL'S MARRIAGE.

CHAPTER XXIII.

OTHERS besides Sir Denis and Mr. Dent had heard that fearful scream, and as they rushed upstairs they saw Beryl's maid hurrying towards her lady's room; but it was Adair who got there first, and opening the door rushed in, plunging and yet dreading to know what was the matter.

He had never entered that room since his marriage. In a hurried visit to Neron Dyke during his brief engagement he had chosen it specially for his wife, and had given the most minute directions as to its decoration and furniture; but then he was a happy, confident lover, and had never guessed that the girl he worshipped would become his wife—in name only.

But this was not the moment to think of by-gone hopes or his ever-present sorrow; the sight which met his eyes was so terrible as to drive away every other thought. Beryl stood by the open window, and she looked to her husband's startled eyes a mass of flames.

Never when people were calmer it seemed easy to understand the cause of the accident. Lady Adair had not gone to bed, but dismissing her maid seated herself by the open window with a book. Still as the day had been with night a cool breeze arose, and this, unheeded by Beryl, had swayed the curtains dangerously near the flame of her candles. Wrapped in her own sad thoughts, the book unheeded on her lap, she had been utterly unconscious of her own peril until the curtain nearest her catching fire the flame attacked the folds of her soft wrapper. She started up, and the very movement seemed to fan the flames. To her bewildered dazed eyes there seemed fire, nothing but fire around her, and with one piercing shriek she rushed towards the door.

So quickly had Denis answered her cry for help that before her shaking nerves could turn the handle he stood beside her. Anxious, terrified as he was, by a supreme effort he kept his wife about him, and seizing hold of the thick eastern hearthrug he rolled it tightly round his wife, never heeding the scorching heat of the flames.

An instant later the maid, who had been searching in the wardrobe, produced a heavy fur-lined cloak, which she handed to him in silence. Mr. Dent the while tearing down the burning curtain, and soaking it and the woodwork near with a can of water, to the wholesale ruin of the furniture.

From the moment of their entrance Beryl had not uttered a single cry or even a moan. She seemed unconscious alike of their presence, of her own danger, and of everything around her. Only as Denis, hoping he had succeeded in putting

savagely; he was thinking of Audrey Nugent, alias Nurse Ann. If a girl who had failed at everything else could put on a uniform and pass for a trained nurse he thought there must be something wrong about the species—in which, of course, he was mistaken.

The doctor came. Oh! the relief and thankfulness of the two men, who loved Beryl Adair, when they heard the wheels of the returning dog-cart, and hurried out into the hall to meet Mr. Carter.

"This is bad news, Sir Denis," he said feelingly; "and you, sir," to Mr. Dent, who had been introduced as Beryl's uncle, "have had a sad welcome to Heron Dyke."

He went upstairs alone. He begged, may he insisted, that neither uncle nor husband should accompany him.

"I will come or send word to you as soon as I can form an opinion," he promised; "but I would rather make my examination without you. Mrs. Curtis and I are old friends, and Lady Adair's maid is a very capable woman."

The moments dragged slowly on; the summer's day was two hours old when at last the longed-for footstep was heard, and Mr. Carter entered the room where Sir Denis and Uncle Joe kept their vigil.

"It is not hopeless," he said gravely, "and that is all I can say."

"The fire lasted such a little while," said Mr. Dent; "I hoped she was not much injured."

"The burns are very slight and only affect one arm," replied the doctor; "but the shock to her nervous system is something terrible, and she has been in a very weak state for some time. Do you know, Sir Denis, if Lady Adair had anything on her mind?"

"I'm afraid so," said Denis, hesitatingly. "No, doctor, I won't fence with you, I know she had. Someone made mischief between us before our marriage, and my poor little wife has never had a happy hour since."

Mr. Carter sighed.

"It will go hardly with her, I fear," he said, gravely, "but I do not give up hope; the shock of the fire coming when she was in such a low, weak state will prostrate her fearfully, and I'm afraid there's brain fever coming on. If she has strength to rally from it all will be well, but—

Both men felt all that the "but" implied without the sorrowful shake of the doctor's head.

"I shall stay here to-night," said Mr. Carter; "and if you would like a second opinion, Sir Denis, I need not tell you I shall be glad to meet anyone you may suggest."

Sir Denis shook his head.

"I'd rather trust her to you; you know all she is to me, and you won't look on my darling as just a mere 'case' to experiment on."

"You'll want a nurse," said Mr. Carter, gravely; "the maid will do for the day, but there must be another for night."

"I hate trained nurses," repeated Denis; "her aunt, Mrs. Dent, will be here to-morrow. Don't you think we might manage?"

"You are thinking of that dressed-up person at the Hall," said Mr. Carter, quickly. "Miss Newcome, or Nurse Ann, as they call her; but, bless you, Sir Denis, she's no more like a properly qualified nurse than a quack bone-setter is like an M.D.; besides, I always fancy myself she's an impostor, who has managed to hoodwink the Blakes somehow. There's a niece of my own who was trained at St. Bartholomew's, and undertakes private nursing; I'll get her to come if possible, and if not she shall send us down some good, womanly creature who'll dissipate your prejudices in no time."

"And I may go upstairs!" breathed Denis, impatiently.

"Lady Adair won't know you," replied the doctor, sadly, "and it will only wring your heart."

"Is she conscious? I could not bear to look at her before; her face was like the dead."

"She is not insensible," answered Mr. Carter. "To my mind it would be less painful if she were, her mind is busy always with—I suppose, poor girl—the things which have occupied it for

the last few months, only she sees everything with distorted eyes; her wandering talk is terrible to me—to you it would be agony."

Mr. Dent put a question which would never have occurred to Adair.

"I suppose Mrs. Curtis and the maid understand my poor niece is wandering; they won't go and spread the report of her wild talk in the servants' hall!"

"Not they," answered the doctor confidently; "to begin with, Mrs. Curtis has served the Adairs too many years to betray their secrets; then she and Jane, who by the way is her niece, know a good deal of illness, and have nursed a fever case before. Besides, Lady Adair's delirium, terrible as it is to listen to, is just this touch of relief about it; it is so wild and frantic one knows it cannot be true. She asked me just now to take her home, she could not stay at Heron Dyke any longer now Sir Denis's first wife was alive. Now such delusions as that are so manifestly fictions of a mind diseased that no one could credit them for an instant."

Sir Denis remembered the claims of hospitality, and insisted that Mr. Dent should at least seek the room prepared for him and try to sleep.

"You have had a journey," he said, kindly, "and a terrible shock, do at least try to get some rest, that when Mrs. Dent arrives she may not be frightened at your appearance."

Joseph Dent wrung the young man's hand.

"Call me if there is any change in Beryl, or if I can be of the least use to you," he urged, and then he went to his own room and tried to forget in slumber the many troubles which hung over the house of Adair.

Denis stayed for some moments alone before he sought his wife's room; he had much to think of apart from her danger. If the warning brought by Mr. Dent was true and Beryl would shortly lose her fortune, why then it seemed to him there was a chance at last of convincing her of his love.

With Beryl actually dependent on him for home and support he might surely prove to her at last that she was not only his wife but his love.

Strange to say, the delirious words repeated by Mr. Carter inspired Denis with a kind of hope. In all the months of their estrangement his greatest trouble had been that Beryl made no specific charge against him, excepting that he had married her for her money. If she really believed, or had been taught to believe, that he had forsaken another woman for her sake, the charge was so manifestly absurd that he could disprove it in a moment.

Strange to say his suspicions rather turned to Lady Lester. She had been desperately anxious at one time for her son to marry Beryl, and might have been angry and annoyed at his (Denis Adair's) success in winning the heiress. She, out of sheer malice, might have told Beryl that Denis was aware of her wealth before he proposed, and might even so—spoil the happiness of the engaged pair, and perhaps, even in the hope of breaking off the match—have made up some story of a poor and beautiful rival deserted by Sir Denis for the sake of Beryl's gold.

If that were so his wife's conduct was perfectly comprehensible to Denis, save only the fact that she had married him.

Presently he stole upstairs and entered the room where his wife lay.

Strange that in the space of a few hours it had assumed all the appearance of a sick room, and, to look at it, might have been employed as such for days. Beryl was in bed, her lovely chestnut hair falling in a golden veil over the white pillow. At one side of the bed was a small table with restoratives. Mrs. Curtis sat at the other her eyes fixed on her lady's face, as though, poor soul, she yearned to help her suffering mistress, but could think of nothing; the doctor, grave and anxious, stood at the foot of the bed.

Beryl was changed indeed in the brief time since Denis had seen her. He had left her white and still as death, only the faint fluttering of her heart telling that she still breathed. Now there was a hectic flush on either cheek. Her eyes

were bright with fever light, and she tossed incessantly to and fro as though stillness were impossible to her. One arm was bandaged in oil and cotton wool, otherwise there was no sign of any injury from the fire. Her eyes moved continually to and fro, now resting on Mrs. Curtis' face, now on the doctor's, but always with the air of a blind person who sees nothing. It did not need her wild delirious words to tell her husband that though her body might be with them her spirit was far away.

"Nell is alive," she said, suddenly, raising herself on her pillows, and fixing her eyes full on Sir Denis, though without the slightest sense of recognition. "Did you know it? I only heard to day. She is alive, and at Ventnor. I must go away. I must go quickly, very quickly, lest she should come and find me here."

Sir Denis laid one hand on Beryl's thin feverish fingers. The very contact burnt him, but she soon writhed them away.

"It was a dreadful day, so cold and sunless; there was a dense fog, just like November, when she came. I was so happy that day till I saw her. I went with her. I could not refuse, and how did I know she was going to wreck my life? To crush the brightness and the hope out of it till I yearned for death."

Denis went nearer to the doctor.

"This is terrible," he whispered. "Surely it must be bad for her to talk like this!"

Mr. Carter shook his head.

"Some secret has been pressing on her mind," he answered, "and the effort of hiding it from the world has been too much for her. These wild babblings, little of truth as there can be in them, will relieve the overladen brain. Concealment and silence have almost broken down her reason."

This was spoken in a low tone, and must have been quite inaudible to the housekeeper, but the good woman attempted a word of comfort as she looked at her master's sad, worn face.

"You mustn't grieve at my lady's not knowing you, Sir Denis," she said respectfully; "in fever cases it's always so. Those the patient loves best in health are the very ones they can't bear to see sometimes."

He bowed his head; then he went a little nearer to his wife and tenderly spoke her name.

"Beryl."

She turned a little uneasily. A smile flitted over her lips, but if Denis thought he had recalled her wandering spirit he was mistaken, as her next words proved.

"It's my mother calling me. Oh, mother, dear, they say you were like me—unhappy, but you died young, and at least you were my father's wife. There was no 'Nell' to torture you. Her sister didn't come to you with great mocking eyes, and call you a murderer. Oh, mother, call me once again, and let me come to you. I'm so tired, mother, and no one wants me here. Denis has got Nell, you know, and I am in the way."

Sir Denis left the room. It was more than he could bear. The kind-hearted doctor, touched by the expression of woe upon the young man's face, signed to Mrs. Curtis to call him if there was any change in the patient, and followed Adair. Not far, Sir Denis had only taken refuge in the next room, where the fire had been; he sat among the *débris* of burnt things and damaged furniture, utterly unconscious of the disorder around him.

"You must not give way," said Mr. Carter, kindly, putting one hand on the young man's shoulder. "Try and recollect it is not your wife who is speaking, but that you are listening to the delirium of fever."

Denis looked up quickly.

"Mr. Carter, tell me, if you had not known me all my life would you not attach some meaning to poor Beryl's words? Supposing she and I were strangers passing through the neighbourhood, and you were suddenly called in to her, would you put her words down to delirium then?"

"You ask me a hard question," replied the elder man. "I can only tell you that nothing in the whole world would make me believe you had wronged your wife. I am as sure of this as

I am that Lady Adair would never utter one word against you."

"But you said she had a secret, that there was something preying on her mind!"

"And I think so still."

"Listen," said Denis, breathlessly; "there has been some evil influence at work, that much I know. Do you think anyone can have been friend enough to tell Beryl that I had been married or engaged before I met her?"

Mr. Carter hesitated.

"To answer that question I should have to ask you another, which you might regard as an insult."

"Ask it."

"Have you ever in your life been acquainted with a girl called Nell?"

"No," said Denis, promptly; then quickly recollecting himself, "at least I did know one girl called Nell in London, last year. She was a lady, but miserably poor. She and her sister half-starved in some cheap lodgings at Islington."

"Did you ever mention these girls to Lady Adair?"

"Never. I intended to indeed. I hoped she might design some way of helping them; but oddly enough, just before our marriage they disappeared." And he told Mr. Carter of his last visit to Hinton-street when he found the sisters flown.

"I was surprised. We had been on very friendly terms, and I thought they might at least have sent me their address. According to their landlady they came suddenly into some money. I don't mean a fortune, but several pounds. Twenty or thirty pounds you know would sound wealth to girls in their poverty."

Mr. Carter nodded his head.

"I must ask you one thing more. You say they were poor. Would they be capable of extorting money by fraud?"

"I—I don't understand."

"I will put it more plainly, and risk your indignation. Supposing, being in mighty want of means, they heard suddenly of your engagement to an heiress, would they be capable of going to her and asserting you were bound to one of them and demanding a sum of money to keep silence on your part?"

Denis Adair's eyes flashed.

"That would explain every word of my wife's delirium."

Mr. Carter shook his head.

"Not quite. There must have been some fresh feature in the case to-day. If we once attach meaning to Lady Adair's ravings we must see that *until to day* she believed "Nell" to be dead, and that she learned to-day she was alive and at Ventnor."

"You know Nurse Ann!" said Denis. "Remember, doctor, this is sacred."

"I know, and distrust her. Well!"

"From the first time I saw her I was conscious of something strangely familiar about her; but only to-day did it flash on me that she was Audrey Nugent, the younger of the girls I have been speaking of. The dyed hair, her assumed profession of a trained nurse had baffled me before."

"And you taxed her with it."

"She admitted it. I inquired for her sister, who had been dangerously ill, and she told me Nell was much better, and staying at Ventnor. I urged Audrey to leave the Blakes, telling her they were the last people in the world to pardon such a deception."

"Sir Denis," said Mr. Carter, sadly, "the case is as clear to me as daylight. The girl at Mr. Blake's, call her by what name you please, is a fiend in human form, and her machinations have well-nigh killed your wife."

He turned to go back to the sick room, and Denis Adair, burying his face in his hands, sat alone in the cold, cruel grey dawn, and sobbed like a little child.

CHAPTER XXIV.

AUDREY NUGENT, *alias* Nurse Ann, *alias* Miss Newcome, was an excellent woman of business, and far too clever to despite a warning because it

had come to her from an enemy. She regarded Denis Adair (since he was Beryl's husband) as her foe; but a little reflection told her he was right about the Blakes. They were just the sort of people to resent her deception; therefore, it would be just as well to take the initiative and hurry on the search of proofs to establish the identity of herself and Nell with the late John Chesney's elder children as soon as possible.

What with first her allowance from the inquiry office, and latterly her salary from Mrs. Blake (paid weekly), Audrey now possessed rather more than twenty pounds, and it occurred to her she had better ask for a few days' holiday and go to London to see after her own business.

Dick Chesney had been careful not to mention the name of the detective who had written to him about the case, but Audrey was acute enough to feel sure that Mr. Tulloch would undertake her inquiries on the "payment by results" system. Apart from that, she had suddenly befooled her of the doctor who last year had claimed to "remember" their father, and that Nell's year of seniority might make her recall things which had been forgotten by her younger sister.

A week would, Audrey reflected, be enough for her three-fold purpose, and if Mrs. Blake hesitated about sparing her she would give notice on the spot, and trust to her twenty pounds lasting until she "got her rights."

Mrs. Blake, however, made no demur; it happened she and her husband were going to spend a week with friends, and as the companion was not included in the invitation the good-natured woman said it was the best plan for her to take her holiday that same week. This entailed leaving the Hall the second day after the garden party; but Audrey had no objection to that. Truth to say, she found the conversation—which generally turned on Lady Adair's critical state—very uninteresting, and quite longed to get away.

She did not confide her hopes and fears to Dick Chesney, for the skillful, accomplished secretary was to attend his patrons on their visit, and so could be of no use to her.

Dick was thankful to get away from the neighbourhood of Heron Dyke. He felt by no means innocent regarding Lady Adair's illness, and when he heard Mr. and Mrs. Dent were staying at Heron Dyke his fears were such that he persuaded the Blakes to start a good two hours earlier than they had intended, and only breathed freely when the train was fairly off.

He was only just in time. The party had not left the Hall an hour when a carriage with servants in the Adair livery drove up, and an elderly gentleman requested to see Mr. Chesney on important business.

"He's not here, sir," was the civil reply; "he's gone away for a week with my master and mistress. They only started this morning."

The visitor hesitated.

"Can I see Miss Newcome?"

It was Mr. Dent. If he could not "have it out" with his brother-in-law he might surely, he reflected, see the destroyer of Beryl's peace, and break a lance in his darling's service. He had never touched on the subject of Beryl's confidence in talking to Adair, but he felt positive Sir Denis was innocent, and the story told to his wife had been a tissue of falsehoods. His chief idea in seeing Miss Newcome was to tell her he knew her fraud, and on Lady Adair's recovery intended to prosecute her for it unless she came to terms and confessed her deception.

But to the conspirator herself when Mr. Dent's card was brought to her, it conveyed but one idea—victory.

Her uncle—she argued—had heard of her claims and come to acknowledge her sister as the rightful heiress of the Chesney property, and to get Nell's address. She made up her mind to be very amiable and gracious to Mr. Dent, but not to be deterred by anything he could say from claiming her own and Nell's rights.

The grave, stern expression on Mr. Dent's face did not in the least enlighten her. Naturally, she thought, he would be vexed at the family property passing to a stranger instead of his beloved niece.

She went up to him with a smile, and held out her hand.

"This is indeed kind, Uncle Joseph. I never thought that you would be so ready to acknowledge us."

"Are you mad, young woman?" asked Mr. Dent, bluntly. "I'm not your uncle, and I'm thankful for it; for if what I have reason to believe of you is correct you have behaved in a way to make any honest man ashamed of you!"

Audrey stared at him.

"I thought your wife was John Chesney's sister," she said, slowly and distinctly.

"Well!"

"And I am John Chesney's daughter; my sister Nell is his eldest child and heiress. When I read the name on your card I thought you had come to offer your help in proving our rights."

"You can prove what you like. If you satisfy the law that you are John Chesney's daughter I shall not oppose your claim."

"It is all very simple," said Audrey. "We were brought up by our aunt, Mrs. Nugent, and bore her name; but our mother, Clara Jecks, was married to John Chesney in Weston Church, the certificate of her marriage and our baptisms is still to be seen there."

"Indeed! You had better communicate with Colonel Trevlyn or his lawyer at once; I can give you his address."

"And have you no word of welcome for your brother's child?" Audrey asked, dramatically. "We—Nell and I—have been defrauded of our rights; we have suffered poverty and privation, while another usurped our home, and now you have not one word of greeting."

"I have a good many words," said Joe Dent, bluntly; "but I don't think you'll care about them. Your father was a bad lot, young woman; your uncle, Dick Chesney, is about as black as man can be, and I rather fancy you are on the road to equal them."

"You are insulting, sir."

"Am I?" He had carefully placed himself between her and the door. "Well, answer me one question. Did you last December come to my house and ask to see my niece?"

"If I did I had a perfect right," she retorted. "Who was Beryl Chesney that I should not be thought good enough to speak to her?"

"I'll tell you; she was a sweet, trustful girl, and you with your vile lies changed her into a sad, disappointed woman. Now, Miss Newcome, Miss Nugent, or Audrey Chesney, or Nurse Ann—you've got a choice of names, anyhow—or whatever you like to call yourself, just listen to me. I'm here in the interests of Sir Denis Adair and his wife; you came to my house last December with a string of lies—and it's one of two things, either you give me your sister's address or I'll prosecute you for defamation of character, that is, Sir Denis Adair will do so."

Audrey laughed, a harsh discordant laugh.

"He'll be too busy nursing his wife. Besides, if she's dying, what does it matter what she believed about her husband?"

"It matters everything to those who love her," said Mr. Dent, gravely.

"Besides," retorted Audrey, "it's all in the family; Denis Adair can't prosecute his sister-in-law, and that's my exact relationship to him."

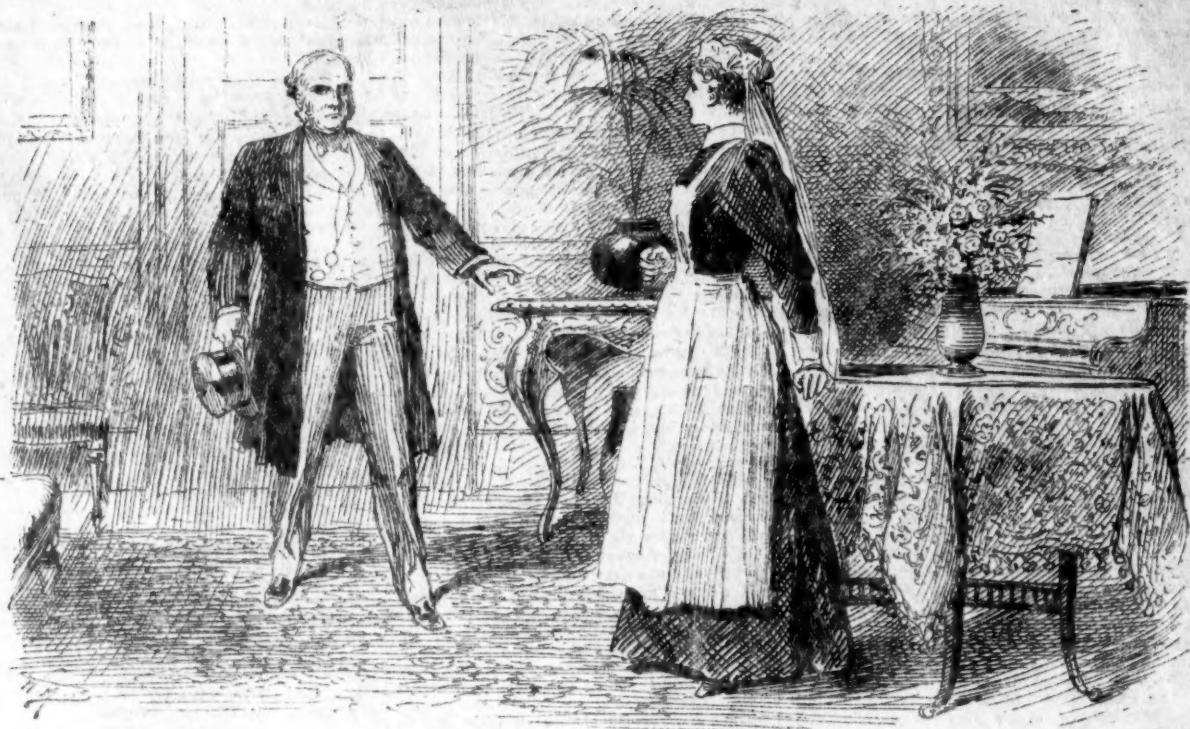
"Is there no pity in your nature?" asked Joseph Dent; "don't you know that you have blighted Beryl's life and well-nigh broken her heart?"

"I'm glad of it!" said Audrey. "Why should she have everything, while Nell and I nearly starved? She was rich and we were poor; but I think I made her suffer for all that."

Mr. Dent rose.

"I won't detain you longer," he said. "Whether Beryl Adair lives or dies be sure you will hear more of this matter. If she dies, you are morally her murderers; if she lives, be very sure that those who love her will find a way to protect her in future from your cruel malice."

"I hope they'll also find a way to make her refund the money of mine she has run through," said Audrey, coldly. "My sister Helen is no woman of business; all power will rest with me, and I shall take care that Beryl Adair repays



"IF BERYL ADAIR DIES YOU ARE MORALLY HER MURDERESS!" MR. DENT SAID, RISING TO LEAVE THE ROOM.

what she has spent of our property to the uttermost farthing."

But the retort was lost on Joseph Dent; he had left the room before she had finished speaking.

Men are not much use in illness; of course there are hundreds of exceptions; still the fact may be laid down as a broad general rule, the sight of suffering he is powerless to prevent or alleviate is positive pain to the average man.

He is not heartless or unfeeling, but he can't bear to be within sound of the room where a life dear to him struggles in the balance. He wants to be up and doing, not seeking pleasure or amusement, but to be doing something for the dear one whom death is threatening to take away.

So it was with Joseph Dent; he could not bear to return to the luxurious home where Beryl Adair lay dying; he could not bear to watch the agony on Denis' face as he sat and waited for news of his wife; to good, brave-hearted Joe Dent to (as he phrased it) to sit down with his hands before him and do nothing to help the poor young couple was impossible.

He would not speak to Denis of his talk with Beryl, and Sir Denis in his turn kept back his own and the doctor's conviction that Beryl's ravings were not the wild babbling of delirium, but just the outcome of some real actual dread which had troubled her before her illness.

To Joe Dent's kindly heart it seemed that to know her fears were groundless must be a comfort to Beryl, whether she lived or died.

Mr. Carter had assured them that even if the worst happened, she would be conscious "before the end," and it seemed to her uncle he could never forgive himself if he failed to prove to her then that she had been mistaken in her judgment of her husband.

He had hoped, brought face to face with a man (instead of dealing with a fragile, sensitive girl), the woman who had wrecked Beryl's happiness would make full confession.

Believing her poor, he had hoped, by a threat of prosecution and of denouncing her to her em-

ployers, she would have done his bidding, but her being really Beryl's half-sister and one of the heiresses to the property, gave her new courage, and Mr. Dent acknowledged bitterly to himself he had failed.

As he walked down Mr. Blake's hall, short as was the time occupied, his mind was made up, he would go straight to Ventnor and see Nell. True, her sister had refused him the address but he did not think the beautiful seaside resort would be very crowded at that season, Nugent was not a common name, and the poor girl's deformity would aid him in tracing her.

He fancied somehow from Beryl's story that "Nell" had had no share in the fraud played on his niece; she had been but a lay figure in the picture, a tool in her sister's hands.

Beryl had only seen her sleeping, and had not been allowed to remain till she awoke; surely both sisters could not be so cruel and heartless as Audrey had shown herself, at least the effort was worth making.

"Nell" too, was John Chesney's heiress; while she lived Audrey could no more claim the property than Beryl could retain it. It would surely be worth while to tell her Beryl's story and when she had heard how Lady Adair had suffered, surely she would confess that Audrey's statement was false from the first, and Denis Adair had never been her lover.

Mr. Dent felt hopeful on one point; he had gained a start on Audrey; she was not in his train, no other left the station for two hours, therefore, even if she followed by the next and went straight to Ventnor he had gained that time on her.

Fortunately, when he reached Waterloo Station a train was just starting for Portsmouth, which was in direct connection with the Isle of Wight steamers; he could arrive at Ventnor by the last boat that night, and would be able to seek out "Nell" before Audrey could reach the Island at all.

He telegraphed to Denis Adair that he was

staying at the Chine Hotel, Ventnor, and begging that the latest news of Beryl might be wired to him in the evening.

The message reached the hotel, and was neither reassuring nor alarming, as it consisted only of two words—

"No change."

Honest Joe Dent wiped his eyes as he read it. It seemed to him there was very little hope left; he had loved Beryl almost as a child of his own. Barely twenty-four years ago he had listened to her story and resolved to bring her and her husband together in spite of the cloud between them.

That purpose never changed; he might only be in time to tell Beryl the truth before she died, but whether she were cut off in the flower of her beauty or spared to be the joy and delight of her husband's heart, Joe Dent made up his mind of one thing, he would unmask Audrey's cruel fraud, Beryl should know that her husband had been true to her in word and deed; should hear she had been his first love as surely as she was his last.

That news Joseph Dent pledged himself to take to Beryl Adair, even if he was only just in time to tell it to her before she journeyed to the land which is very far off.

(To be continued.)

A NOVELTY in a steam launch has just been completed. It is nine feet long, with thirty-two inch beam and a nine-inch propeller. The engine weighs sixty-five pounds, and is said to be the smallest marine engine ever made. The launch will carry three persons, and is complete in every respect. There are lockers and air and watertight cabinets, for the launch was built for an artist, and every appliance necessary for the business has been provided. Cedar and oak are the woods used in the construction of this lilliputian craft, which, when fully rigged, weighs one hundred and seventy-five pounds.



SLOWLY AND BLINDLY IVY GROPED HER WAY TOWARDS THE DOOR.

THE ROMANCE OF IVY MOSS.

—105—

CHAPTER XV.

CHAOS.

"No, it will not do, Ivy, my dear, clever as you are," went on Ronald, wagging his head slowly in an odiously wise and solemn manner.

Then he clutched the tall tumbler, and this time drained it.

He thumped down the empty glass and sprawled back again in his chair.

"Everybody," said he—"and who better than yourself, Ivy!—knows that Keith Falconer is in love with my wife. Confound him!" growled Ronald, with an abrupt change of tone and gloomily-puckered brows. "Worships the very ground she walks upon, in fact, and is never happy away from her side. Ha, ha, ha!"

Ivy could not speak.

She was simply stricken dumb.

Speechless she stared at Ronald Dundas with wide and dismayed eyes.

"Oh, ah, you are putting it on pretty strong, I can see," he sneered, scowling upward at her from beneath the penthouse of his straight dusky brows, "but you are a fool, as I hinted just now, to get acting the innocent saint for my ecification. Upon my life and honour, I should have thought that you had discovered by this time that I am not to be gulled quite so easily. A bright idea of yours, that, Ivy—pretending a virtuous ignorance, the sweet simplicity of budding seventeen, at this time o' day! Rather too old and experienced for that, ain't you?"

Still Ivy did not speak.

She could only stare at Ronald, her accuser.

Had he drunk himself mad, she was wondering dully? Had something gone wrong with his brain?

The first heat of her intense anger had died out, and a horrible cold fear was stealing over and benumbing her whole body.

What strange, unholy words would he utter next? She soon heard.

"I suppose," he shouted hoarsely, sitting bolt upright now, and gripping the arms of the easy-chair to keep his balance as he sat—"I suppose you would like me to believe that he came down here to this accursed Stoke Bay expressly to see me—oh? That is so very probable; isn't it?"

"What else—what else—should he come for?" Ivy whispered with difficulty.

She was obliged to put her hand to her throat, or she felt that she could not have articulated a syllable.

"Go on, Ivy, keep it up—that's capital! We all of us know—don't we—how fond he is of the younger, for—for the sake of the child's father, of course! Remarkably kind of him! You believe that now, don't you?" said Ronald savagely.

"Why not?" Ivy answered stupidly, her brain going round. "What should I believe then, Ronald?"

She felt both faint and bewildered. Yet even now she did but very dimly comprehend the nature of the accusation that he was trying to bring against her.

However, in the next minute every faculty within her was stirred into passionate life.

"Oh, ah, of course we are properly blind to it all—and understand nothing," continued Ronald Dundas, in the same taunting, savage voice, and with the same fierce menacing scowl. "It is for my sake naturally—not for my wife's—that he nightly, over the cards, flings away his money—purposely loses a heap or so o' gold, when perhaps with a little thought and care he might as easily keep it in his own pocket."

"Ronald!" ejaculated Ivy, in accents of horror.

Was she, in truth, beginning to understand at last?

"And naturally, too, it is for the sake of the—husband—and never for the sake of the wife—that Keith Falconer happens to have discovered a miraculously generous dealer in the frame and

picture line somewhere or other in Bond-street—Bond-street in the clouds—ha, ha!—who for a wretched sketch or daub not worth five sovereigns can at once by Falconer himself be persuaded to fork out fifteen or twenty. All this for my sake, of course! A friend with a vengeance that sticketh closer than a brother—"

Ivy stopped him.

She could endure no more of his fiendish banter.

The helpless, horrified silence which she had maintained while listening to him, now gave way suddenly to something like a scream.

She flung herself upon her knees at the feet of Ronald Dundas; and so clung desperately to his arm with two strained white quivering hands.

"You mean to say in this ironical, roundabout manner—you are telling me in cold blood," she gasped, "that—that we are even now—and have been doing so all along—living—living on Keith Falconer's money! His charity! nothing less! You are telling me—telling me, Ronald—is it possible!—that it was his money which brought us here to Stoke Bay; that he has, in plain language, been—keeping— Oh, Ronald," she broke off, panting and shivering from head to foot, "not that, not that; not so bad as that! Surely—oh, surely, Ronald, you have not been so base, have not fallen so low, as to allow—as to know that—"

Once more Ronald Dundas laughed out long and brutally; a laugh that ended in a violent hiccough.

"Oh, yes, I have," said he then, with something of his old jaunty air; "and so have you, you infernal hypocrite, Ivy! Who all along, I should like to hear, has known better than yourself that for love of you—for love of you, do you understand, Ivy, my dear?—Keith Falconer's purse and his cheque-book have—"

"Stop!" cried Ivy, in a low authoritative voice—a strange hollow agonised voice altogether unlike her own.

She released his arm mechanically.

She shrank from him in loathing and disgust

by far too deep for expression in speech ; her eyes, in a wild stare of horror, fixed upon the dark handsome dissolute face of the man who had dragged her down to this !

To this cruel, cruel depth of unspeakable degradation !

Heaven pity and help her ! For did it not verily seem as if her whole life long was to be but one dreary record of shame and humiliation ?

Her love—her once passionate and all too-confiding love—her love for Ronald had hitherto been dying a gradual death ; slow, but sure enough, as she believed. And now it lay dead within her heart—bruised, shattered, utterly dead ; abruptly slain outright, as she told herself, by Ronald Dundas himself. And yet, oh, how she had once loved this man ! How truly and how unselfishly had she once loved him !

"Don't stare at me," he cried, roughly, "don't stare at me—do you hear !—in that beastly theatrical fashion, you—"

As he hurled at her a coarse, foul epithet that never should sully the hearing of any pure-souled woman, he thrust her, nay, struck her from him with a blow upon her breast. And the effort sent him rolling backward into his chair again.

She fell against the table in the centre of the room, but fortunately was not seriously hurt, and soon, by the convenient aid of it, she had dragged herself upward to her feet.

Nevertheless, she felt much shaken and rather dizzy ; and the blood seemed to be rising from the region of her heart and surging with a humming noise over her brain.

She threw back her head forlornly, covering her eyes with one hand.

And thus, slowly and blindly, she groped her way towards the door.

"Good-bye, Ronald," said Ivy, gently.

His head had sunk to his chest.

His hands once more were rammed down into his pockets. His long legs were spread out in the old favourite attitude.

As he gave her no answer of any kind, Ivy paused upon the threshold to say "good-bye" again. The second time she spoke more distinctly ; and then he heard her.

His reply, however, was merely a curse, muttered drowsily—that was all.

So Ivy closed the sitting-room door noiselessly, and then left him alone in his chair.

So left him for evermore !

Heavily—heavy in spirit—she went to the bedroom, where Derrick was sleeping peacefully the sweet unhaunted sleep of guiltless childhood.

There, by her darling's cot, Ivy dropped quietly to the floor, and stretched her yearning arms over the little unconscious body. But she could not yet pray for strength and guidance—not yet.

She broke instead into a fit of helpless, hopeless weeping ; and perhaps the rush of tears would ease her misery.

A few minutes after six o'clock Ivy and her little son had quitted Miss Spicer's house on the heights.

Not a soul was astir within it ; and but few were abroad outside ; for the dawn had been too ruddy to be the harbinger of fair weather, and the clouds hung low and sulien now over a stormy rolling sea.

It was a fresh cold morning ; and rain in all probability would follow later on. For skylight soft-white looked the screaming gulls, dipping to and wheeling around the tempestuous green water.

For one brief, heart-bursting moment Ivy halted at the drawing-room door.

With breath suspended she listened miserably at the keyhole—Ronald, within the room, was snoring loudly, she could hear.

"Good-bye," she murmured, for the third and last time. "Ronald, good-bye !"

Out on the esplanade an adventuresome bather in flannels, towel in hand, was strolling down towards the windy sands. But there were no rickety landaus, no public conveyances of any kind anywhere in sight.

Here and there an early maid-servant was engaged in cleaning her lodging-house door-steps, stopping every now and then in her work to clasp her grimy cap upon her head.

Whilst Ivy was washing and dressing him Derrick asked no questions—to do so would be unlike the little boy. But presently he remarked wistfully—

"Aren't we getting up rather early, mother ?"

"Yes, my darling—earlier than we usually do," answered Ivy, choking silently.

That was all then. Afterwards, when out of doors upon the pavement, the child said suddenly—

"And isn't father coming with us ?"

"No, Derrick."

"Nor yet Mr. Falconer, mother ?" said the little boy wistfully.

"No, no, no, child—we are going alone."

For a few seconds Derrick remained silent, pondering the situation.

Then he said thoughtfully—

"Have we got enough luggage, mother, do you think ? Only this bag ?"

"Enough for the present, darling," Ivy told her little son.

She looked anxiously, but in vain, up and down the gusty esplanade ; and added, before the child could speak again,—

"I don't see any carriages about, Derrick. It is too early for them, I suppose. I wonder, dear, whether you could walk as far as the station ?"

"Oh, yes, mother. I can walk as far as the station, I'm sure !" said the little soul, trustfully.

So they made their way towards the farther end of the town ; the part of it where the station was situated ; Ivy taking the back streets and meaner thoroughfares, so as to avoid passing the Grand Hotel and the apartments of Mrs. Featherstone and her daughter.

At twenty-five minutes to seven they had reached the Stoke Bay station. About a dozen passengers—all men—were waiting upon the platform for the first swift train up to town.

Ivy went to the booking office ; Derrick clinging to her gown and taking care of the bag meanwhile.

"One and a half third-class to Liverpool-street," she said to the ticket-clerk ; who looked cold, sour, and only partly awake. "Have we long to wait ?"

"No—ten minutes. Train due here at 6.50."

He slapped down her change, and gave his attention to the next applicant, who, being a passenger travelling first-class, got more civility than had been accorded to Ivy.

Fortunately the refreshment-room had just been opened ; and there was time to buy a glass of milk and a stale sponge-cake for Derrick.

Then the rumble of the approaching train was heard ; and they hastened out to take their seats.

In the railway-carriage, when they were starting, Derrick said, in his small puzzled voice,—

"And are we going back to London, then, mother dear ?"

And Ivy answered wearily, as two or three rain-drops, like big tears, were spashed down upon the carriage window-panes,—

"Yes, my darling ; back to London. We have nowhere else to go."

"And what shall we do when we get there ?" persisted the little boy.

"We shall hide ourselves from everyone, my darling," was his mother's forlorn reply.

CHAPTER XVI.

ADRIFT AND ALONE.

A YEAR and a half had passed away—a year and a half which to Ivy Dundas had seemed, verily, like a lifetime.

It was a bright late March day, with a fresh but not a cold wind—was that one on which Hyacinth, Countess of Exe came in her luxurious carriage to Ivy's quiet lodgings, and carried her off to Valley Grange.

"Thank Heaven, the crisis, the danger is past. And the lingering illness is over at last !"

For Ivy had been ill—very ill—sick almost unto death.

Toll, struggle, grief had shattered her spirit, and broken her down utterly at last.

Never once since she had parted from him at Stoke Bay had she set eyes on the man who was her husband.

For aught that he was to her now Ronald Dundas might be dead.

When she left him she had stood alone in the world—alone with her child ; and with her little lad, she would fight the battle of life alone and single-handed.

So she had determined ; and so indeed had she done to the best of her power. But Ivy had found the fight a hard one—too hard !

Yet never, voluntarily, would she see Ronald Dundas again.

She taught at starvation terms for a living. She painted Christmas-cards and face. She even hired herself out as a waitress, at parties in private houses.

And at last in despair of ever again finding ease and comfort for herself and the child, she—under a *nom de guerre*—agreed to sing nightly at the Moorish Pagoda for Mr. Hector Lorraine.

It was Hyacinth Featherstone who, just before her marriage with the Earl of Exe, had persuaded Ivy to this step.

"It is your duty—because you can do it, Ivy," had said the far-seeing, practical Cynthia, who one day would be Her Grace the Duchess of Dartmoor. "For the boy's sake you must pocket your foolish pride and prejudices, and sing at Lorraine's Pagoda. No one will know you. The audience, it is true, is generally vulgar, but friendly always to a real good thing. They recognise talent when they meet with it."

So Ivy had consented in the end, much to the delight and triumph of Mr. Hector Lorraine, and for a while earned easily her fifteen pounds a week ; and indeed was easier and happier at the time than she had been for many years.

And then the child, the little delicate lad Derrick, had sickened and died in a wintry London ; and Ivy, broken-hearted in the dust, laid his death at Ronald's door.

"It is his fault—wholly his fault," she moaned, perhaps illogically. "If he had been a good husband and father all might have gone well with us. As it is, he has killed my darling, and I will never see him again !"

And then brain fever, in its worst form, had intervened, striking Ivy very low ; and life for many weeks had become a blank to her.

But she was young and strong, and youth in the end vanquished the foe.

And so it came to pass that one March day, in the convalescent time, Ivy opened her languid eyes to see Hyacinth, Countess of Exe, sitting there, quite at home, by her bedside.

Cynthia nodded and smiled, and stroked Ivy's frail white hand, which lay so listlessly upon the coverlet, her own shapely one adorned with many a costly ring.

She was beautifully dressed ; and her fine healthy complexion was as clear as ever.

Her bright abundant fair hair was twisted up into its usual graceful knot ; and the smile of Cynthia, Countess of Exe, was the same frank, charming, unaffected smile of the old Cynthia Featherstone.

She had sent the carriage home, she observed, and should return by train to Valley Grange.

"It is only a little way out of London, you know, dear," said Cynthia ; and went on to tell Ivy that the Grange was one of her Ludovic's "places," and that things at Dart Castle in Devonshire were rather "strained" just now.

"The old people vow that they will never forgive Ludovic," laughed Cynthia, "but we shall see."

Ivy smiled with closed eyes.

"And Valley Grange is in Surrey, I think ?" she said gently.

"Yes, my dear Ivy," replied Cynthia. "And away to Valley Grange I intend to take you as soon as you are fit to travel."

And then the dingy landlady brought in what she called tea.

As the bright young Countess was bidding her friend an affectionate good-bye, and assuring Ivy heartily that she would come again on the morrow,

the invalid put her arms suddenly around Cynthia's neck and whispered,—

"Cynthia, where is—where is Ronald now?"

"My dear, that I cannot tell you."

"Do not you really know?"

"I would tell you, Ivy, this moment if I did."

"Does—does anyone know?"

"Yes; I believe that your best friend knows."

"You are my best friend, Cynthia."

"No, dear, I am not," she replied calmly.

To this assertion Ivy made no rejoinder. But she trembled slightly as she clung to Lady Exe, with her white face hidden on Cynthia's bosom.

"Mr. Falconer is your best friend, dear—the best and truest friend woman ever had," said Cynthia, in the same level tone. "You will have to acknowledge it some day, Ivy."

"No, no, no," Ivy shivered, "he is nothing to me."

"There are few men living like him," said the Countess boldly. "You would do well to remember that."

Ivy was still very weak.

A trifle was sufficient to unnerve her, and she burst into fits of helpless weeping.

"Now I solemnly declare," announced Lady Exe, "that if you do not stop those tears this very instant I will not listen to another word—I mean it—nor will I remain here with you for another moment; but straightway I shall march out into the street and drive in a hansom to Waterloo Station as hard as I can go!"

Ivy feared that she was in earnest; that she would carry out her threat; so, making haste to dry her eyes, she said to Cynthia brokenly:

"Don't go! See—there I am calm. I will not cry, Cynthia—I am quiet again; indeed I am. But tell me—have pity on me—what have you done with—where have you put my darling, my little lad Derrick? Oh, my child, my child!"

Cynthia held Ivy close to her breast.

"We buried him," said Lady Exe, very gently, "in Valley churchyard—a sweet shady old country churchyard it is, as you will see by-and-by, dear Ivy—and that is one reason why we want you to come to us."

"How good of you—how good of you!" Ivy sobbed.

"Dearest, it was Mr. Falconer's doing, not ours," explained Cynthia. "I told him that I somehow felt certain you would not like your darling to be hidden away in a crowded London cemetery—"

"Oh, no," put in Ivy, in tremulous accents; "not that!"

"And then he—Mr. Falconer—suggested immediately," went on Cynthia quietly, "that the little grave should be near us in Valley churchyard. I am sure Mrs. Dundas would like that," he said.

"I bless and thank you, Cynthia, from the bottom of my soul," said Ivy earnestly.

"Honour, dear, to whom honour is due!" answered Lady Exe obstinately. "You must bless and thank Mr. Falconer by-and-by. That, dear Ivy, is only your duty. We saw a good deal of him," added the young Countess, "whilst you were lying so ill; indeed, met him very frequently; and Ludovic and he became quite chummy. More than once lately he has dined with us and remained for the night at Valley Grange. Ludovic likes him immensely, now that he knows more of him—and so I," announced the Countess stoutly.

Ivy to this could find no reply; so kept dumb, her face still averted from the fast-fading light.

And then soon afterwards arrived that memorable March day when Ivy left for ever her dingy lodgings, and went with her friend Cynthia to Valley Grange.

The pretty house was by no means small, Ivy found, nor was it, on the other hand, too straggling and large.

But it was a commodious and decidedly old-fashioned abode, in which, from the moment of crossing its threshold and entering the roomy old hall, a stranger might look around him and somehow at once feel at home.

Built of white stone which, with time and storm, had taken a grayish, greenish hue, it

stood surrounded by about five and forty acres of lovely parkland, lying well back from the broad high-road; so that only the chimneys and upper windows of the Grange were hers and there through the trees visible to passers-by.

A private path across the grounds—narrow, winding, and copse-shaded—led one to a lonely wicket in the low flint wall of Valley churchyard.

Every day, when the weather was warm and fine, Ivy went with Lady Exe for a long and delightful drive somewhere—the young Earl asking occasionally whether he might accompany them—and so explored the charming country neighbourhood in the midst of which Valley Grange was situated.

"I have ordered the carriage this morning," announced Cynthia, one day after breakfast, "to take us across to Wimbledon. Ludovic has an engagement in town, and won't be home until dinner time; and so we ourselves need be in no hurry to get back to Valley. If you don't mind, dear Ivy, we are going to call on my mother—she will be so pleased to see you again. She knows that you are stopping with us at Valley; and she will feel hurt and slighted perhaps if I do not take you to see her."

"What," cried Ivy involuntarily, "has Mrs. Featherstone, then, left Hornsey—left Minerva-crescent!"

"Months ago. I thought I had mentioned it," replied Lady Exe. "Dear old mother—bless her!—is simply in clover now, thanks to my own good generous boy, with a snug little villa and servants of her own!"

On their return, after a pleasant, chatty day at the Wimbledon villa, having alighted from the carriage and entered the hall, the Countess inquired of the servant who had opened the door whether his lordship had got back from town.

"No, my lady, he has not," replied the young man, who at the time was new to his place.

"Has anyone called in my absence?" asked Cynthia then.

"Yes, my lady—a gentleman," answered the man-servant. "He arrived about an hour ago. But hearing that neither you, my lady, nor his lordship was at home, he said he would wait until you came in. I showed him, at his request, into the library, and gave him the daily papers."

"What is his name?" inquired Cynthia quickly; pausing as she moved across the hall to glance over her shoulder at the man.

And to Ivy, at any rate, the servant's answer came like a thunderbolt.

"Mr. Falconer, my lady," said he.

Keith Falconer at Valley Grange!

Lady Exe herself, not in the least astonished at the man-servant's reply, turned and put another question to him.

But Ivy stayed to hear no more.

Without once looking back, she walked straight up to her two pleasant rooms, locked her bedroom door, and flung herself down upon the dressing-room sofa.

Many a confused and painful thought was hurrying through her brain—the unlooked-for arrival of Mr. Falconer somehow sorely troubled her.

The news of his presence in the house had filled her with a curious sense of unrest, of dismay, of vague unsettledness; and, as she lay prone there amongst the silken sofa-cushions, she was suddenly possessed of a longing to escape from the peace and quiet of Valley Grange.

Yet whether, at a moment's notice, should she flee?

However, common sense soon came to her aid; and she smothered down the small voice as it were that was whispering within her and inciting her to so foolish a course.

Never once since those old dead and gone Stoke Bay days had Ivy Dundas seen Keith Falconer. Fine feeling, true delicacy of thought and action, had hitherto prevented his seeking her out personally, now that she was parted from Ronald.

But now—this intrusion of his—what did it import! She wondered very much.

How long she had been lying motionless there upon the couch in her dressing-room she had

not the faintest idea. But daylight she could see was fading, and a soft sapphire twilight was coming on.

Hark! Yes—the shrill little clock upon her bedroom mantelpiece was striking seven; and there was someone tapping at and rattling the handle of the farther door.

"It is only I," called out Cynthia. "Mayn't I come in?"

Ivy, with a stifled sigh, arose to admit the brisk young Countess.

Full of animation she entered; and Ivy perceived directly that she had put on her dinner-gown—a lovely peach-coloured satin with festoons of grosgrain-like lace falling from throat to hem, a close-circling necklace of twisted seed-pearls for her sole ornament, save the blood-red damask rose she carried in her hand.

"Gracious, Ivy! What, all in the dark, or nearly so!" she exclaimed. "You really must hurry along, my dear. We are dining a little earlier than usual this evening; for Ludovic has got back from town as hungry as the proverbial hunter. Come!" cried Cynthia, bustling about in her lovely sheeny robe, "let us shed a little more light upon the scene. You cannot see to dress in the dark, Ivy."

Speaking, she trailed to and fro, and lighted the wax candles in both rooms.

"There," said Cynthia; "and now look alive, my dear!"

Ivy meanwhile had returned to her sofa.

"My head aches badly, Cynthia," she said in a pleading tone. "Please don't ask me to join you at dinner. I—I cannot come down this evening."

Cynthia looked at her friend quickly, and not without vexation. And Ivy fancied that Cynthia knew she was not speaking the exact truth.

"Ivy, dear," said the young Countess, "this is tiresome of you; for Mr. Falconer dines and sleeps to-night at Valley Grange—"

"You have invited him to stay!" ejaculated Ivy involuntarily.

"Certainly I have," replied Cynthia. "Why not, pray? He mostly stays the night here when he comes to dine."

"Well, I cannot see him—yet," said Ivy, querulously.

"I suppose—nay, I hope—that you will be well enough to come down by-and-by? A cup of tea in the drawing-room, dear Ivy, may cure the headache," remarked Cynthia gravely.

"If you do not mind, I should like the tea—here—now, Cynthia," Ivy suggested meekly.

"Of course. But you must have some dinner too. I shall send Nanette up with it," declared Lady Exe promptly.

"Oh, Cynthia!" Ivy cried, petulantly, "do you not comprehend, or will you not? My head is bad—really bad. How can one eat dinner with a bad nervous headache?"

"One cannot, I know, with some nervous headaches," answered the Countess, dryly. "I scarcely understood, dear Ivy, that yours was of that inconvenient kind."

"Well, it is; and tea, I assure you, is all that I want; so please send up nothing besides," Ivy told her wearily.

Cynthia was shrewd—occasionally, perhaps, too shrewd—and it was difficult at any time to hoodwink her.

She laughed pleasantly as she turned to go, saying,—

"Oh, very well! Nevertheless it won't do to have you shutting yourself up here to starve. Recollect that you are an invalid, and want feeding up and looking after."

With that she went; and Ivy fancied she was left in peace. But the next moment Cynthia popped her fair head into the room again, to say,—

"Be sure you come down presently if you can. Perhaps when the young men have got rid of me I may run up and fetch you, myself."

She smiled; nodded brightly; and then she really did go.

Cynthia's visit had thoroughly dispelled Ivy's physical languor. She could no longer lie passive, nursing her sombre thoughts.

Nanette, too, the Countess's own maid, had appeared with the tea. It was very good, and

very strong, and it had refreshed and cleared the brain of Ivy, bestirring it to increased activity.

She rose, laved her hot forehead and hands in some toilet-vinegar and water, and began to pace restlessly from one room to the other.

The house seemed unusually quiet; by this time, Ivy thought, they must be shut in the dining-room.

She went to one of the windows and looked out. The dusk of the spring evening had deepened to an amethyst gloom. The sward of the park was silvered lightly with dew. The young moon, pale as a primrose, was rising above the ragged black plantation which hid from Ivy's gaze the village church of Valley.

To-day she had had no opportunity of going to the churchyard; and seldom, since she had been living in Lord Exe's house, had a day gone by without her visiting—alone, but carrying with her beautiful flowers from the Valley Grange conservatories—the little grave of her lost lad Derrick.

It was late—true.

But she could very well go at this hour; no one would molest her; the grounds were strictly private.

Now would she be missed by anyone, Ivy told herself. And she could easily get back to the house and upstairs again before her friend the Countess had quitted the dining-room.

So Ivy, wrapping herself in a long black-silk cloak which was lined with mink-velour, hood and all, started quietly on her errand.

(To be continued.)

A SISTER'S REVENGE.

—10.—

CHAPTER XX.

"I AM very grateful to you for the service you have rendered to my little sister," said Duncan extending his hand to the little veiled figure standing in the shade of the orange-trees. "Allow me to thank you for it."

Poor Madge! she dared not speak lest the tones of her voice should betray her identity.

"I must for evermore be as one dead to him," she whispered to her wildly beating heart.

Duncan wondered why the little, fluttering fingers dropped so quickly from his clasp; he thought he heard a stifled sigh.

The slight, delicate form looked strangely familiar, yet he could see it was neither Connie, Myra, nor Blanche.

She bowed her head with a few low-murmured words he scarcely caught, and the next instant the little figure was lost to sight in the darkness beyond.

"Who was that, Molly?" he asked, scarcely knowing what prompted the question.

Alas! for the memory of childhood, poor little Molly had quite forgotten!

"It is so stupid of me to forget, but when I see her again I shall ask her name and try and remember it."

"It is of no consequence," said Duncan, raising the little figure in his arms and bearing it quickly up the gravelled path to the house.

As he neared the house Duncan observed there was a great confusion among the servants. There was a low murmur of voices, and lights moving to and fro.

"What is the matter, Parsons?" cried Duncan anxiously of the servant who came out to meet him.

"Mrs. Field is very ill, sir," he answered gravely. "It is a paralytic stroke, the doctor says. We could not find you, so we sent for Dr. Heyward at once."

It seemed but a moment since he had parted from his mother, in the gathering twilight, to search for Molly!

His mother very ill! Dear Heaven, he could scarcely realize it!

"Oh, take me to mother, Duncan," cried Molly, clinging to him piteously. "Oh, it cannot—it cannot be true; take me to her, Duncan."

The sound of hushed weeping fell upon his ears, and seemed to bring to him a sense of what was happening.

Like one in a dream he hurried along the corridor toward his mother's boudoir. He heard his mother's voice calling for him.

"Where is my son?" she moaned.

He opened the door quickly and went in. Her dark eyes opened feebly as Duncan entered, and she held out her arms to him.

"Oh, my son! my son!" she cried; "thank Heaven you are here."

She clung to him, weeping bitterly. It was the first time he had ever seen tears in his mother's eyes, and he was touched beyond words.

"It may not be as bad as you think, mother," he said; "there is always hope while there is life."

She raised her face to her son's, and he saw there was a curious whiteness upon it.

The large, magnificent room was quite in shadow; soft shadows filled the corners; the white statuettes gleamed in the darkness; one blind was half drawn, and through it came the soft, sweet moonlight.

A large night-lamp stood upon the table, but it was carelessly shaded.

Faint glimmers of light fell upon the bed, with its costly velvet hangings, and on the white, drawn face that lay on the pillows, with the grey shadow of death stealing softly over it—the faint, filmy look that comes only into the eyes that death has begun to darken.

His mother had never been demonstrative; she had never cared for many caresses; but now her son's love seemed her only comfort.

"Duncan," she said, clinging close to him, "I feel that I am dying. Send them all away—my hours are numbered—a mist rises before my face, Duncan. Oh, dear Heaven! I cannot see you—I have lost my sight—my eyes grow dim."

A cry came from Duncan's lips.

"Mother, dear mother!" he cried, "there is no pain in this world I would not undergo for your dear sake!" he cried, kissing the stiffening lips.

She laid her hands on the handsome head bent before her.

"Heaven bless you, my son," she murmured, "Oh, Duncan, my hope and my trust are in you," she wailed. "Comfort me, calm me—I have suffered so much. I have one last dying request to make of you, my son. You will grant my prayer, Duncan! Surely Heaven would not let you refuse my last request!"

Duncan clasped her in his arms. This was his lady-mother, whose proud, calm, serene manner had always been perfect, whose fair, proud face had never been stained with tears, whose lips had never been parted with sighs or worn with entreaties.

It was so new to him, so terrible in its novelty, he could hardly understand it. He threw his arms around her, and clasped her closely to his breast.

"My dearest mother," he cried, "you know I would die if you my death would benefit you. Why do you doubt my willingness to obey your wishes, whatever they may be? Whatever I can do to comfort you I will surely do it, mother."

"Heaven bless you, Duncan," she cried, caressing his face and his hands. "You make death a thousand-fold more easy to bear, my darling, only son!"

"My dear sir," said the doctor, bending over him gently, "I must remind you your mother's life hangs on a thread. The least excitement, the least agitation, and she will be dead. No matter what she may say to you, listen and accede."

Duncan bent down and kissed the pale, agitated face on the pillow.

"I will be careful of my dearest mother. Surely you may trust me," he said.

"I do," replied the doctor, gravely. "Your mother's life, for the present, lies in your hands."

"Is it true, Duncan, that I must die?" he gasped.

The look of anguish on his face answered her.

"Duncan," she whispered, clinging like a child to his strong white hands, "my hope and trust are in you, my only son. I am going to put your love to the test, my boy. I beseech you to say

"Yes" to the last request I shall ever make of you. Heaven knows, Duncan, I would not mention it now, but I am dying—yes, dying, Duncan."

"You need not doubt it, mother," he replied, earnestly. "I cannot refuse anything you may ask. Why should I?"

But, as he spoke, he had not the faintest idea of what he would be asked to do. As he spoke his eyes caught the gleam of the moonlight through the window, and his thoughts travelled for one moment to the beloved face he had seen in the moonlight, and how fair and innocent that face was as they parted on the night they were married!

The picture of that lonely young girl-wife, going home by herself, brought tears to his eyes.

"Was there ever a fate so cruel?" he said to himself. "Who ever lost a wife on his wedding-day?"

Surely there had never been a love dream so sweet, so passionate, or so bright as his. Surely there had never been one so rudely broken.

Poor little Madge—his wife—lying cold and still in death! And now his mother was to be taken from him.

The feeble pressure of his mother's hands recalled his wandering thoughts.

"Listen, Duncan," she whispered, faintly, "my moments are precious."

He felt his mother's arms clasp closely round his neck.

"Go on, mother," he said, gently.

"Duncan, my son," she whispered, gasping, "I could not die and leave the words unspoken. I want my race to live for generations after me. Your poor little lame sister will go unmarried to the grave; and now all rests with you, my only son. You understand me, Duncan; you know the last request I have to ask."

For the first time a cry came to Duncan's lips; her words pierced like a sword.

"Surely, mother, you do not mean—you do not think I could ever—"

The very horror of the thought seemed to completely unman him.

"You will marry again," she interrupted, finishing the sentence he could not utter. "Remember, she whom you loved is dead. I would not have asked this for long years to come, but I am dying—I must speak now."

"Good Heavens, mother!" he cried out in agony, "ask anything but that. My heart is torn and bleeding; have pity on me—have pity!"

Great drops of agony started on his brow; his whole frame shook with agitation.

He tried to collect himself, to gather his scattered thoughts, to realise the full import of the words his mother had spoken.

Marry again! Heaven pity him! How could he harbour such a thought for a single instant, when he thought of the pale, cold face of little Madge—his fair young bride—whom he so madly loved, lying pale and still in death, like a broken lily, down in the dark, bottomless pit which never yielded up its terrible secrets!

"Duncan," wailed his mother, feebly, gazing into his eyes with a suspense heart-breaking to witness, "don't refuse me this the first prayer I had ever made. If you mean to refuse, it would be kinder far to plunge a dagger into my heart and let me die at once. You cannot refuse." One trembling hand she laid on his breast, and with the other caressed his face. "You are good and gentle of heart, Duncan; the prayers of your dying mother will touch you. Answer me, my son; tell me my proud old race shall not die with you, and I will rest calmly in my grave."

The cold night-wind fanned his pallid brow, and the blood coursed through his veins like molten lead. He saw the tears coursing down her pale, withered cheeks. Ah, was it brave to speak the words which must bring despair and death to her? Was it filial to send his mother to her grave with sorrow and sadness in her heart? Could he thrust aside his mother's loving arms and resist her dying prayer? Heaven direct him! he was sorely tried.

"Comfort me, Duncan," she whispered; "think of how I have loved you since you were a little child; how I used to kiss your rosy little face and dream what your future would be like. If comes back to me now while I plead to you

with my fast-fleeting breath. Oh, answer me, Duncan!"

All the love and tenderness of the young man's impulsive heart was stirred by the words. Never was a man so fearfully tried. Duncan's handsome face had grown white with emotion; deep shadows came into his eyes. Ah, what could it matter now! His hopes were dead, his heart crushed, yet how could he consent!

"Oh, Heaven, Duncan!" she cried, "what does that look on your face mean? What is it?"

The look of terror on her face seemed to force the mad words from his lips, the magnetic gaze seemed to hold him spellbound. He bent over his mother and laid his fresh young face on the cold, white face of his dying mother.

"Promise me, Duncan," she whispered.

"I promise, mother!" he cried. "Heaven help me; if it will make your last moment happier, I promise!"

"Heaven bless you, my noble son," whispered the quivering voice. "You have taken the bitter sting from death, and filled my heart with gratitude. Some day you will thank me for it, Duncan."

They were uttered! Oh, fatal words! Poor Duncan, wedded and parted, his love-dream broken, how little he knew of the bitter grief which was to accrue from that promise wrung from his white lips!

Like one in a dream he heard her murmur the name of Lena Stanton. The power of speech seemed denied him; he knew what she meant. He bowed his head on her cold hands.

"I have no heart to give her," he said, brokenly. "My heart is with Madge, my sweet little lost love!"

Poor Duncan! how little he knew Madge was at that self-same moment watching with beating heart the faint light of his window through the branches of the trees.

Madge, whom he mourned as dead—dead to him for ever, shut out from his life by the rash words of that fatally cruel promise.

CHAPTER XXI.

ONE thought only was uppermost in Madge's mind as she sped swiftly down the flower-bordered path in the moonlight, away from the husband who was still so dear to her.

"He did not recognise me!" she panted, in a quivering voice. "Would he have cursed me, I wonder, had he known it was I?"

Down went the little figure on her knees in the grass.

"Oh, dear, what shall I do!" she cried out in sudden fright. "How should I know she was his sister when I told her my name!"

A twig brushed by some night-bird's wing fell from the bough above her head.

"He is coming to search for me," she whispered to herself.

A tremor passed through her frame, the colour dashed into her cheeks and parted lips, and a startled, wistful brightness crept into her blue eyes.

Ah! there never could have been a love so sweetly trusting and child-like as little Madge's for handsome Duncan, her husband in name only.

Poor, innocent little Madge, if she had walked straight back to him, crying out—"Duncan, Duncan, see, I am Madge, your wife!" how much untold sorrow might have been spared her.

Poor, lonely, heart-broken child-bride! how was she to know Duncan had bitterly repented and come back to claim her, alas! too late! how he mourned for her, refusing to be comforted, and how they forced him back from the edge of the treacherous shaft lest he should plunge headlong down its terrible depths!

Oh! if she had but known all this!

If Duncan had dropped down from the clouds she could not have been more startled and amazed at finding him in such close proximity to her here in Scotland.

She remembered he had spoken to her of his mother, as he clasped her to his heart out in the starlight of that never-to-be-forgotten night, whispering to her of the marriage which had been the dearest wish of his mother's heart.

She remembered how she had bid her happy, rosy, blushing face on his breast, and asked him if he was quite sure he loved her better than Lena Stanton, the haughty, beautiful heiress.

"Yes, my pretty little sweetheart, a thousand times better," he had replied, emphatically, holding her off at arm's length, and watched the heightened colour that surged over the dainty, dimpled face so plainly discernible in the white, radiant starlight.

Madge rested her head on one soft little hand, and gazed thoughtfully up at the brilliant stars that gemmed the heavens above her.

"Oh, if you had only warned me, little star," she said. "I was so happy then; and now life is so bitter."

A sudden impulse seized her, strong as her very life, to look upon his face again.

"Then I would be content to live my weary life out uncomplainingly," she said.

Without intent or purpose she walked hurriedly back through the pansy-bordered path she had so lately traversed.

The grand old trees seemed to stretch their giant arms protectingly over her, as if to ward off all harm.

The night-wind fanned her flushed cheeks and towed her golden curls against her wistful, tear-stained face.

Noisily she crept up the wide gravelled path that led to his home—the home that should have been hers.

Was it fancy? She thought she heard Duncan's voice crying out,—

"Madge, my darling!"

How pitifully her heart thrilled! Dear Heaven, if it had only been true. It was only the murmur of the wind sighing among the trees.

A light burned dimly in an upper window. Suddenly a shadow fell across the silken curtains. She knew but too well whose shadow it was.

The proud, graceful pose of the handsome head, and the line of the dark curls waving over the broad brow, could belong to no one but Duncan.

There was naught but the pitying moonlight out there to see how passionately the poor little child-bride kissed the pale rose on which that shadow had fallen, and how she broke it from its stem and placed it close to her beating heart—tho' lonely starved little heart, chilled by the withering frost of neglect, when life, love, and happiness should have been just bursting into bloom for her.

"He said I had spoiled his life," she sighed, leaning her pale face wistfully against the dark-green ivy vines. "He must have meant I had come between him and Lena. Will he go back to her now that he thinks me dead?"

One question alone puzzled her. Had Molly mentioned her name, and would he know it was she, whom everyone believed lying so cold and still in the fathomless pit.

She could not tell.

"If I could but see Molly for a moment," she thought, "and beseech her to keep my secret."

Molly had said her brother was soon going away again.

"How could I bear it," she asked herself pitifully.

It was not in human nature to see the young husband whom she loved so well drifting so completely away from her, and still remain silent.

"I will watch over him from afar; I will be his guardian angel; but I must remain as one dead to him forever," she told herself.

Afar off, out on the dancing moonlit waters, she saw a pleasure-boat gliding swiftly over the rippling waves.

She could hear merry laughter, gay, happy voices, and snatches of mirthful songs. Suddenly the band struck up an old, familiar strain.

Poor little Madge leaned her head against the iron railing of the porch and listened to those

cruel notes—the piece they played was "Love's Young Dream."

Love's young dream! Ah! how cruelly hers had ended! She looked up at the fleecy white clouds above her, vaguely wondering why the love of one person made the earth a very paradise or a wilderness.

As the gay, joyous music floated up to her, the words of the post found echo in her heart in a passionate appeal,—

"No one could tell, for nobody knew,
Why love was made to gladden a few;
And hearts that would forever be true,
Go lone and starved the whole way through."

Oh! it was such a blessed relief for her to watch that shadow! Duncan was pacing up and down the room now, his arms folded, and his head bent on his breast.

Poor, patient little Madge, watching alone out in the starlight, was wondering if he was thinking of her.

No thought occurred to her of being discovered there with her arms clasped around that marble pillar, watching so intently the shadow of that graceful, manly figure pacing to and fro.

No thought occurred to her that a strange event was at that moment transpiring within those walls, or that something unusual was about to happen.

How she longed to look upon his face for just one brief moment. Estrangement had not chilled her trusting love, it had increased it, rather, tenfold.

Surely it was not wrong to gaze upon that shadow—it was her husband's.

In that one moment a wild, bitter thought swept across her heart.

Did Duncan regret their marriage because she was poor, friendless, and an orphan? Would it have been different if she had been the heiress of Stanton Hall?

She pitied herself for her utter loneliness. There was no one to whom she could say one word of all that filled her heart, no face to kiss, no heart to lean on; she was completely alone. And this was the hour in which her fate was being decided for her.

There was no sympathy for her, whose isolation was so bitter. She thought of all the heroines she had ever read of. Ah! no one could picture such a sad fate as was hers.

A bright thought flashed across her lonely little heart.

"His mother is there," she sighed. "Ah! if I were to go to her and cry out—'Love me I love me! I am your son's wife!' would she cast me from her? Ah, no, surely not; a woman's gentle heart beats in her breast, a woman's tender pity. I will plead to her on my knees to comfort me to show me some path out of the pitiful darkness. I could love her because she is his mother."

Madge drew her breath quickly; the colour glowed warmly on her cheek and lips; she wondered she had not thought of this before. Poor child, she meant to tell her all, and throw herself upon her mercy.

Her pretty, soft blue eyes, tender with the light of love, were swimming in tears. The vain hope was struggling in her heart—Duncan's mother might love her, because she worshipped her only son so dearly.

Would she send her forth from that home that should have sheltered her, or would she clasp those little cold hands in Duncan's strong white ones, as she explained to him, as only a mother can, how sadly he had misjudged poor little Madge—his wife!

No wonder her heart throbbed pitifully as she stole silently across the shadowy porch, and, quivering from head to foot, touched the bell that echoed with reverberating sound through the long hall.

"I would like to see Mrs. Field," she said, hesitatingly to the servant who answered her summons. "Please do not refuse me," she said, pleadingly, clasping her little white hands; "I must see her at once. It is a question of life or death with me. Oh, sir, please do not refuse me. I must see her at once—and—all alone!"

CHAPTER XXII.

In the beautiful drawing-room at Stanton Hall sat Lena Stanton, running her white, jewelled fingers lightly over the keyboard of a grand piano; but the music evidently failed to charm her. She arose and walked listlessly toward the window, which opened out upon the wide, cool, rose-bowered porch.

The sunshine glimmered on her amber-satin robe, and the white frostwork of lace at her throat, and upon the dark, rich beauty of her southern face.

"Miss Lena," called Mrs. Martin, the house-keeper, entering the room, "there is a person downstairs who wishes to see you. I have told her repeatedly it is an utter impossibility, you would not see her; but she declares she will not go away until she does see you."

Lena turns from the window with cold disdain.

"You should know better than to deliver a message of this kind to me. How dare the impudent, presuming beggar insist upon seeing me! Order the servants to put her out of the house at once."

"She is not young," said the venerable house-keeper, "and I thought, if you only would—"

"Your opinion was not called for, Mrs. Martin," returned the heiress, pointing haughtily toward the door.

"I beg your pardon," the housekeeper made answer, "but the poor creature begged so hard to see you I did feel a little sorry for her."

"This does not interest me, Mrs. Martin," said Lena, turning toward the window, and indicating the conversation was at an end—"not in the least."

"Heaven pity you, you stony-hearted creature," murmured the sympathetic old lady to herself as the door closed between them. "One word wouldn't have cost you much. Heaven knows, it's mighty little comfort poor old master takes with you. You are no more like the bonny race of Stantons than a raven is like a white dove." And the poor old lady walked slowly back to the dark-robed figure so eagerly awaiting her in the hall.

"There was no use in going to my young mistress; I knew she would not see you. But I suppose you are satisfied now."

"She utterly refuses to see me, does she?" asked the woman in an agitated voice, "when you told her I wished to see her particularly?"

The housekeeper shook her head.

"When Miss Lena once makes up her mind to a thing, no power on earth can change her mind," she said; "and she is determined she won't see you, so you may as well consider that the end of it."

Without another word the stranger turned and walked slowly down the path and away from Stanton Hall.

"Fool that I was!" she muttered through her clinched teeth. "I might have foreseen this. But I will haunt the place day and night until I see you, proud heiress of Stanton Hall. We shall see—time will tell."

Meanwhile, Mrs. Martin, the housekeeper, was staring after her with wondering eyes.

"I have heard that voice and seen that face somewhere," she ruminated, thoughtfully; "but where—where! There seems to be strange leeks in this brain of mine—I cannot remember."

A heavy, halting step passed the door, and stopped there.

"What did that woman want, Mrs. Martin?"

She started abruptly from her reverie, and replied, hesitatingly—

"She wanted to see Miss Lena, sir."

"Was Lena so busily engaged she could not spare that poor creature a moment or so?" he inquired, irritably. "Where is she?"

"In the parlour, sir."

With slow, feeble steps, more from weakness than age, Miles Stanton walked slowly down the corridor to the parlour.

It was seldom he left his own apartments of late, yet Lena never raised her superb eyes from the book of engravings which lay on her lap as he entered the room.

A weary smile broke under his silver-white moustache.

"You do not seem in a hurry to bid me welcome, Lena," he said, grimly, throwing himself down into an easy-chair opposite her. "I congratulate myself upon having such an affectionate daughter."

Lena tossed aside her book with a yawn.

"Of course I am glad to see you," she replied, carelessly, "but you cannot expect me to go into ecstasies over the event, like a child in pinaflores might. You ought to take it for granted that I'm glad you are beginning to see what utter folly it is to make such a recluse of yourself."

He bit his lip in chagrin. As is usually the case with invalids he was at times inclined to be decidedly irritable, as was the case just now.

"It is you who have driven me to seek the seclusion of my own apartments, to be out of sight and hearing of the house full of simpering idiots you insist upon keeping about you," he cried, angrily. "I came back to Stanton Hall for peace and rest. Do I get it? No."

"That is not my fault," she answered, serenely. "You do not mingle with the guests. I had no idea they could annoy you."

"Well don't you suppose I have eyes and ears, even if I do not mingle with the chattering magpies you fill the house with? Why, I can never take a ramble in the grounds of an evening without stumbling upon a dozen or more pairs of simpering lovers at every turn. I like darkness and quiet. Night after night I find the grounds strung up with these Chinese lanterns, and I cannot even sleep in my bed at night for the eternal brass bands; and in the daytime not a moment's quiet do I get owing to these infernal sonatas and screeching trills of the piano. I tell you plainly, I shall not stand this thing a day longer. I am master of Stanton Hall yet, and while I live I shall have things my own way. After I die you can turn it into pandemonium, for all I care."

Lena, spurred on by opposition, beginning to lose her temper, flashed her large dark eyes upon him surprisedly.

"I am sure I do not mean to make a hermit of myself because you are too old to enjoy the brightness of youth," she flashed out defiantly; "and you ought not to expect it—it is mean and contemptible of you."

"Lena!" echoed Miles Stanton, in astonishment, his noble face growing white and stern with suppressed excitement, "not another word!"

Lena tossed her head contemptuously. When once her temper arose it was quite as impossible to check it as it was when she was a wilful, revengeful spoiled child.

"Another man as rich as you are would have taken his daughter to London for a season, and in the summer to the country—somewhere, anywhere, away from the detestable monotonous country. When you die, I shall have them all set on fire."

"Lena!" he cried, hoarsely, rising to his feet and drawing his stately, commanding figure to its full height. "I will not brook such language from a child who should at least yield me obedience, if not love. You are not the heiress of Stanton Hall yet, and you never may be. If I thought you really contemplated laying waste these waving fields that have been my pride for long years—and my father's before me—I would will it to an utter stranger, so help me Heaven."

Were his words prophetic? How little she knew the echo of these words were doomed to ring for all time down the corridors of her life! How little we know what is in store for us!

"I am your only child," said Lena, haughtily; "you would not rob me of my birthright. I shall be forced to submit to your pleasure—while you are here, but, thank Heaven, the time is not far distant when I shall be able to do as I please. 'The mills of the gods grind slowly, but they grind exceeding sure,'" she quoted, saucily.

"Thank Heaven the time is not far distant when I shall be able to do as I please." He repeated the words slowly after her, each one sinking into his heart like a poisoned arrow. "So you would thank Heaven for my death, would you?" he cried, with passion rising to a white heat. "Well, this is no better than

I could expect from the daughter—of such a mother."

He had never intended speaking those words; but she goaded him on to it with her taunting, scornful smile, reminding him so bitterly of the one great error of his past life.

He was little like the kind, courteous master of Stanton Hall, whom none named but to praise, as he stood there watching the immovable face of his daughter. All the bitterness of his nature was rocked by passion. No look of pain or anguish touched the dark beauty of that southern face at the mention of her mother's name.

"You have spoken well," she said. "I am her child. You speak of love," she cried, contemptuously. "Have you not told me, a thousand times, you never cared for my mother? How, then, could I expect you to care for me? Have you not cried out unceasingly for the golden-haired young wife and the babe you lost, and that you wished Heaven had taken you too? Did I ever hear my mother's name upon your lips except with a sneer? Do you expect these things would make that mother's child more fond of you, were you twenty times my father?"

She stood up before him, proudly defiant, like a beautiful tragedy queen, the sunlight slanting on her amber satin robe, on the long, dark, silken curly fastened with a ruby star, and on the deep crimson-hearted passion-roses that quivered on her heaving breast. There was not one feature of that gloriously dark face that resembled the proud, cold man sitting opposite her.

He knew all she had said was quite true. He had tried so hard to love this beautiful queenly girl from her infancy up. He was tender of heart, honest and true; but an insurmountable barrier seemed ever between them; each year found them further apart.

Miles Stanton lived over again in those few moments the terrible folly that had cursed his youth, as he watched the passionate face before him.

"Youth is blind, and will not see," had been too bitterly true with him. It was in his college days, when the world seemed all gaiety, youth and sunshine to him, he first met the beautiful face that was to darken all his after life. He was young and impulsive; he thought it was love that filled his heart for the beautiful stranger who appeared alone and friendless in that little college town.

He never once asked who or what she was, or from whence she came, this beautiful creature with the large, dark, dreamy eyes that thrilled his heart into love. She carried the town by storm; every young man at the college was deeply, desperately in love. But Miles, the handsomest and wealthiest of them all, thought what a lark it would be to steal a march on them all by marrying the dark-eyed beauty then and there.

He not only thought it, but executed it; but it was not the lark that he thought it was going to be. For one short happy week he lived in a fool's paradise, then a change came over the spirit of his dreams. In that one week, she had spent his year's income and all the money he could borrow, then petulantly left him in anger.

For two long years he never looked upon her face. One stormy night she returned quite unexpectedly at Stanton Hall, bringing with her their little child Lena, and, placing her in her father's arms, bitter recriminations followed. Bitterly Miles Stanton repented the terrible mistake of his youth, that hasty marriage.

When the morning light dawned he took his wife and child from Stanton Hall—took them abroad. What did it matter to him where they went? Life was the same to him in one part of the world as another. For a year they led a weary life. Heaven only knew how weary he was of the woman the law called his wife!

One night, in a desperate fit of anger, she threw herself into the sea; her body was never recovered. Then the master of Stanton Hall returned with his child, a sadder and wiser man.

But the bitterest drop in his cup had been added last. The golden-haired young wife, the sweet woman whom he had married last, was taken from him; even her little child, the

image of that fair young mother, had not been spared him.

How strange it was such a passionate yearning always came over him when he thought of his child!

When he saw a fair, golden-haired young girl, with eyes of blue, the pain in his heart almost stifled him. Some strange, unaccountable fate urged him to ever seek for that one face even in the midst of crowds.

It was a mad, foolish fancy, yet it was the one consolation of Miles Stanton's weary, tempest-tossed life.

No wonder he set his teeth hard together as he listened to the cold words of the proud, peerless beauty before him, who bore every lineament of her mother's dark, fatal beauty—this daughter who scornfully spoke of the hour when he should die as of some happy, long looked-for event.

Those waving corn-fields that stretched out on all sides as far as the eye could reach, like a waving field of snow, laid waste beneath the fire-fight's scorching breath! Never—never!

Then and there the proud, self-conscious young heiress lost all chance of reigning queen, by fair means, at Stanton Hall.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE servant who opened the door for Madge looked earnestly at the fair, pleading young face, framed in rings of golden hair, so pure and spirituelle that it looked like an angel's with the soft moonlight falling on it.

"You will not refuse me," she repeated timidly. "I must speak to Mrs. Field."

"You have come too late," he replied, gently; "Mrs. Field is dead."

The man never forgot the despairing look of horror that deepened in the childish blue eyes raised to his.

"Duncan's mother dead!" she repeated slowly, wondering if she had heard aright. "Oh, my poor Duncan, my poor Duncan."

How she longed to go to him and comfort him in that terrible hour. But she dared not intrude upon him.

"If there is any message you would like to leave," said the kind-hearted footman, "I will take it to Mr. Duncan."

"No," said Madge, shaking her head, "I have no message to leave; perhaps I will come again—after this is all over," she made answer hesitatingly.

Her brain was in a whirl; she wanted to get away all by herself to think.

"Please don't say anyone was here," she said, quickly. "I—I don't want anyone to know."

The sweet, plaintive voice, as sweet as the silvery note of a forest bird, went straight to his heart.

Whatever the mission of this beautiful, mysterious visitor, he would certainly respect her wishes.

"I shall not mention it if you do not wish it," he said.

"Thank you," she replied, simply; "you are very kind. My life seems made up of disappointments," she continued, as she walked slowly home under the restless, sighing branches.

It seemed so indeed. She was so young and inexperienced to be thrown entirely upon the cold, pitiless world—cut off so entirely from all human sympathy.

She entered the house unobserved. Connie—bright, merry, dashing Connie—was singing like a lark in the drawing-room, making the old house echo with her bright young voice.

"How happy she is," thought Madge wistfully. "She has home, friends, and love, while I have nothing that makes life worth the living."

Like a shadow she flitted on through the dim shadowy hall toward her own little room. She saw Myra's door was ajar as she passed it, and the sound of her own name caused her to pause voluntarily.

It was very natural for Madge to pause. How many are there who would have passed on, I said Blanche, coolly.

quietly, with no desire to know what was being said of themselves, when they heard their own names mentioned in such a sneering manner!

Madge certainly meant no harm by it; she paused, thoughtfully and curiously as anyone would have done.

"I am sure I don't like it," Myra was saying, spitefully. "It is an actual shame allowing Madge Meadows to remain here. Uncle Jasper was a mean old thing to send her here, where there were three marriageable young ladies. I tell you he did it out of pure spite."

"I believe it," answered Blanche sputtered. "All my admirers hint for an introduction, or ask for it outright."

"What do you tell them?" questions Myra, eagerly.

"Tell them I Why, I look exceedingly surprised, and reply—I do not know to whom you refer. We have no company at the house just now." "I mean that beautiful, golden-haired little fairy, with the rosy cheeks and large blue eyes. If not your guest, may I ask who she is?" I am certainly compelled to answer so direct a thrust," continued Blanche, angrily; "and I ask in well-feigned surprise—'Surely you don't mean Madge Meadows, my mother's paid companion?'

"What do they say to that?" asked Myra, laughing heartily at her elder sister's ingenuity, and tossing her curl-papers until every curl threatened to tumble down. "That settles it, doesn't it?"

"Mercy, no," cried Blanche, raising her eyebrows; "not a bit of it. The more I say against her—in a sweet way of course—the more they are determined to form her acquaintance."

"I don't see what everyone can see in that little pink-and-white baby-face of hers to rave over so," cried Myra, hotly. "I can't imagine where in the world people see her. I have as much as told her she was not expected to come into the parlour or drawing-room when strangers were there, and what do you suppose she said?"

"Cried, perhaps," said Blanche, yawning.

"She did nothing of the kind," retorted Myra. "She seized my hand and said—'Oh, Miss Myra, that is very kind of you indeed. I thank you ever so much.'"

"Pshaw," cried Blanche, contemptuously. "That was a trick to make you believe she did not want to be observed by our guests. She is a silly, designing little creature, with her pretty face and soft, childish ways."

"But there is one point that seriously troubles me," said Myra, fastening the pink satin bow on her tiny slipper more securely, and breaking off the thread with a nervous twitch. "I am seriously afraid, if Duncan were to see her, that would be the end of our castle in the air. Madge Meadows has just the face to attract a handsome, debonair young fellow like Duncan."

"You can depend upon it he shall never see her," said Blanche, decidedly. "Where there's a will there's a way."

"I have never been actually jealous of any one before," said Myra, flushing furiously as she acknowledged the fact; "but that Madge has such a way of attracting people toward her, they quite forget your presence when she is around. When one rival leaves the field, another one is sure to come to the fore." That's a true saying," said Myra, meditatively. "You see, he did not marry the heiress of Stanton Hall. So he is still in the market, to be captured by some lucky girl."

"Well, if I am the lucky one, you must forgive me, Myra. All is fair in love and war, you know. Besides, his wealth is too tempting to let it slip quietly by without a struggle."

Before she could reply, Connie popped in through the long French window that opened out on the porch.

"Oh, I'm so tired of hearing you two talk of lovers and riches!" she cried, throwing herself down on the sofa. "I do hate to hear love weighed against riches, as if it were a purchasable article. According to your ideas, if a fellow was worth a few thousands you would love him moderately; but if he was worth half a million, you could afford to love him immensely."

"You have got a sensible idea of the matter," said Blanche, coolly.

"For shame!" cried Constance, in a hot fury. "It's an actual sin to talk in that way. If a handsome young man loves you, and you love him, why, you ought to marry him if he hadn't a shilling in the world!"

Myra and the worldly wise Blanche laughed at their younger sister's enthusiasm.

"Now, there's Duncan Field, for instance," persisted Connie, absolutely refusing to be silenced. "I would wager a box of the best kid gloves either one of you would marry him tomorrow, if he were to ask you, if he hadn't a penny in his pocket."

"Pshaw!" reiterated Myra, and Blanche murmured something about absurd ideas; but nevertheless both sisters were blushing furiously to the roots of their hair. They well knew in their hearts what she said was perfectly true.

"Constance," said Blanche, laying her hand coaxingly on the young rebel's arm. "Myra and I want you to promise us something. Come, now, consent that you will do as we wish, that's a good girl."

"How can I promise before I know what you want?" said Connie, petulantly. "You might want the man in the moon, after you've tried and failed to get his earthly brethren, for all I know!"

"Connie, you are actually absurd!" cried Blanche sharply. "This is merely a slight favour we wish you to do."

"If you warn her not to do a thing, that is just what she will set her heart upon doing," said Myra, significantly.

By this time Connie's curiosity was well up.

"You may as well tell me, anyhow," she said; "for if you don't, and I ever find out what it is, I'll do my very worst, because you kept it from me."

"Well," said Myra, eagerly, "we want you to promise us not to give Madge Meadows an introduction to Duncan Field."

A defiant look stole over Connie's mischievous face.

"If he asks me, I'm to turn and walk off, or I'm to say, 'No, sir, I am under strict orders from my marriageable sisters not to.' Is that what you mean?"

"Connie," they both cried in chorus, "don't be unfeistly; don't put a stumbling-block in our path; rather, remove it!"

"I shall not bind myself to such a promise!" cried Connie. "You are trying to spoil my pet scheme. I believe you two are actually witches, and guessed it. What put it into your heads that I had any such intentions?"

"Then you were actually thinking of going against our interest in that way," cried Myra, white to the very lips, "you insolent little minx!"

"I don't choose to remain in such polite society," said Connie, with mocking courtesy, skipping toward the door. "I may take a notion to write a little note to Mr. Duncan, inviting him over here to see our household fairy, just as the spirit moves me."

This was really more than Myra's warm temper could bear. She actually flew at the offending Connie in her rage; but Connie was nimble of foot, and disappeared up the stairway, three steps at a bound.

"What a vixen our Myra is growing to be!" she cried, panting, as she reached the top step.

She saw a light in Madge's room, and tapped quietly on the door.

"Is that you, Connie?" cried a smothered voice from the pillows.

"Yes," replied Connie: "I'd like very much to come in. May I?"

For answer Madge opened the door, but Connie stood quite still on the threshold.

"What's the matter, Madge; have you been crying?" she demanded. "Why, your eyelids are red and swollen, and your eyes glow like stars. Has Myra or Blanche said anything cross to you?" she inquired, smoothing back the soft golden curls that clustered round the white brow.

"No," said Madge, choking down a hard sob; "only I am very unhappy, Connie, and I feel just—just as if everyone in the world hated me."

"How long have you been up here?" asked

Connie, suspiciously, fearing Madge had by chance overheard the late conversation downstairs.

"Quite an hour," answered Madge, truthfully. "Then you did not hear what I was talking about downstairs, did you?" she inquired, anxiously.

"No," said Madge; "you were playing over a new waltz when I came upstairs."

"Oh," said Connie, breathing freer, thinking to herself, "she has not heard what we said. I am thankful for that."

"You must not talk like that, Madge," she said, gaily, clasping her arms caressingly around the slender figure leaning against the casement. "I predict great things for you—wonderful things. Do not start and look at me so curiously, for I shall not tell you anything else, for it is getting dangerously near a certain forbidden subject. You know you warned me not to talk to you of love or lovers. I intend to have a great surprise for you. That is all I'm going to tell you now."

Connie was almost frightened at the rapture that lighted up the beautiful face raised to her own.

"Has anyone called for me, Connie?" she asked, piteously. "Oh, Connie, tell me quickly! I have hoped against hope, almost afraid to indulge so sweet a dream. Has anyone inquired for me?"

Connie shook her head, sorely puzzled.

"Were you expecting anyone to call?" she asked. She saw the light die quickly out of the blue eyes and the rich peach-like bloom from the delicate, dimpled cheeks. "I know something is troubling you greatly, little Madge," she said, "and I sympathise with you, even if I may not share your secret."

"Everyone is so cold and so cruel to me, I think I should die if I were to lose your friendship, Connie," she said.

Connie held the girl's soft white hand in hers.

"You will never die, then, if you wait for that event to happen. When I like a person, I like him for all time. I never could pretend a friendship I did not feel. And I said to myself the first moment I saw you: 'What a sweet little fairy! I shall love her, I'm sure!'"

"And do you love me?" asked Madge.

"Yes," said Connie; "my friendship is a lasting one. I could do almost anything for you."

She wondered why Madge took her face between her soft little palms and looked so earnestly down into her eyes, and kissed her lips repeatedly.

Poor Madge! If she had only confided in Connie—reckless, impulsive, warm-hearted, sympathetic Connie, it might have been better for her.

"No matter what you might hear of me in the future, no matter what fate might tempt me to do, promise me, Connie, that you, of all the world, will believe in me, you will not lose your faith in me." The sweet voice sounded hollow and unnatural. "There are dark, pitiful secrets in many lives," she said, "that drive one to the very verge of madness in one's woe. If you love me, pray for me, Connie. My feet are on the edge of a terrible precipice."

In after years Connie never forgot the haunted look of despair that crossed the fair face of Madge Meadows as the words broke from her lips in a piteous cry.

(To be continued.)

THE BANKER'S HEIRESS.

—20—

(Continued from page 38.)

May felt as if she could dispense with the relationship. She wondered what Marion would say could she know of that *tête-à-tête* in the doctor's consulting room—not yet six months' old; but she was a loyal, generous girl, and she resolved her cousin should never hear of Keith's temporary breach of faith.

"It was only a momentary madness, even of pity, for my loneliness," she thought. "Marion is his real choice. I was but a passing fancy. Well, I daresay they will be very happy; but I would give worlds if some lucky chance would take me away until after this wedding."

And the lucky chance actually came.

To her intense surprise the morning's post brought May a letter from Lady Merton, containing a very warm invitation to her niece to spend the spring and summer with her, and enter such society, under her auspices, as her recent mourning permitted.

May placed the letter in Mrs. Anderson's hands as soon as she could get her comfortably to herself.

"What shall I do?"

Mrs. Anderson sighed, but she was not selfish.

"I think you ought to go, May. Such society as Lady Merton offers you is your birthright. We shall miss you bitterly—more bitterly than ever when Marion leaves us, but I think you ought to go," kissing her.

"It is just that," said May, impelled to confidence by that motherly care, and knowing her regrets would be ascribed to Lord Carlyon and not to Keith Foster. "Marion is to be married soon; she told me so, and I do not think I could bear to be at a wedding—not just yet."

"It is only natural, dear. But you are very young; I trusted time might have effaced Lord Carlyon's image from your heart."

"I shall get over my trouble in time," said May, resolutely; "only I could not bear to be at a wedding or see a *rousseau* just yet; and so, as Aunt Merton has asked me, I think I had better go. Only you and Uncle Charles won't think me ungrateful; I could not bear that."

"And you will come back!" said Mrs. Anderson, a little wistfully. "But I fear not, May; with your face you are not likely to be allowed to be our sunshine long."

"I will come back when the wedding is over," said May, blithely. "And now I must write to Aunt Merton."

CHAPTER VI.

LITTLE did May even guess at what had prompted this invitation. Sir Cecil Graham had but recently returned to Europe; the first news that met him was of his cousin's losses and his daughter's sorrows.

Young, chivalrous, and energetic, the Baronet's first step was to seek out Lady Merton, and insist that she and her orphan niece should occupy Meadowview—at least for the present.

In the meantime he placed the late Sir John's affairs in the hands of an able solicitor, who stated there was not the least doubt that Mr. Mortimer had defrauded his partner's child, and that when legal proceedings were taken he would be only too thankful to disgorge his ill-gotten gains to save himself the disgrace of a criminal prosecution.

But having set all this on foot Sir Cecil became possessed with a strong desire to see his young cousin.

Even without the Graham estates he was a man of large wealth. And brilliant dreams of what might ensue from the meeting haunted the dowager and made her send that invitation to Clapham.

A day or two in town and then Lady Merton confided her plans to May—that delightful Sir Cecil had placed Meadowview at their disposal—had positively begged her to go to it.

May acquiesced languidly. A summer at her

old home must be dear to her under any circumstances. And so the middle of April found them located at Staines.

Everything was as she had left it. Sir Cecil had made no alterations: the same servants waited on her, and with all their old respect.

May felt as if life had gone back a year, but for her father's loss. But for the consciousness of that wedding soon to be she would have been happy.

She received very few letters from Clapham, and these contained hardly any allusion to the marriage.

May little guessed the loving zeal, the careful anxiety with which her aunt and Marion avoided all reference to what so engrossed their thoughts.

And then, when she had been at Meadowview three weeks—when she felt almost as if she had never left the sweet, sweet home—one afternoon, when her aunt was out, the servant announced Sir Cecil Graham.

With a strange hesitation she received the last representative of her house—a tall, erect, soldierly-looking man—so young that his smile had almost a boyish gaiety—so frank and cordial that his manner set her at ease directly.

"I wanted to see you very much," he began, after they had shaken hands. "I wish from my heart I had been in England in November."

"You could not have saved papa."

"I might have lightened his anxieties; at least I could have taken care of you. It seems, May (you'll let me call you that as we're cousins), Mortimer had been robbing him right and left for years. The money on which the scandalous lives—what he has settled on his wife—is all your father's."

"I have managed without it," said May, a little weary. "People have been very good to me."

He smiled.

"I can believe that. But, May, as your nearest relation on your father's side, as the head of the family, I cannot see you wronged."

"You would never speak to Mr. Mortimer!"

"Speak to him!" laughed Sir Cecil. "He wouldn't care for that. I have sent my lawyer to him and given him his choice—a public investigation and a criminal prosecution or restitution."

"How could he restore the money if he had settled it on his wife? Besides, his daughter—"

"Yes," interrupted the young baronet; "I know money is not all of which that family have robbed you. I cannot undo that, but the money they must refund. No settlement on a wife—no portion to a daughter—could stand if the settlement or portion has to be paid with stolen money. And so, May, you will be somewhat of an heiress after all. We have got back some ninety thousand pounds of your poor father's capital, and it is safely invested in my name as your guardian and trustee."

May took the news of her wealth very easily.

"You are a very young guardian!"

"I am twenty-four! I mean to take good care of you, Miss May, I can assure you."

"Thank you."

"And now you must make up your mind where you would like to live. Shall I lend you Meadowview for a few years? It seems a great deal more yours than mine."

She shook her head.

"You are very, very good to me! It has made me very happy coming here, and I should like to stay until the summer is over."

"And then?"

"Then I will go back to Clapham."

In a few words she told him how she had been received there, and how generously kind they had been.

He listened attentively.

"Yes, it would be mean to leave them altogether now; but you ought to have a season in London every year. I daresay Lady Merton would arrange it."

In the month that followed Sir Cecil and his cousin were thrown a great deal together, and, long before it was over, the baronet had made up his mind that he could not spare her to go back to Clapham, she must stay with him always.

By an entirely new process a French chemist has made a new alcohol, which is absolutely pure. The following is said to be his method: He sends a current of hydrogen gas through the flame of an electric arc formed between carbon rods. This produces acetylene, which combines with nascent hydrogen, and yields ethylene. The last mentioned hydro-carbon absorbed in sulphuric acid makes sulphuric acid, and mixing and boiling with water finally produces alcohol.

as his much-loved wife. But when he told his tale, when he pleaded for a favourable answer, May buried her face in her hands, and sobbed aloud.

"Oh! Cecil, I am so sorry; I never thought of this."

"But you will think of it now!" he urged. "You will not send me away hopeless, May!"

"I must!"

"In time" he pleaded; "when you have forgotten!"

"Listen," she whispered; "I am not thinking of Lord Carlyon; he was my girlish ideal, and when he shattered my esteem for him my love went too. When I was homeless, penniless, someone asked me to be his wife for mere love's sake. I was mad with pride and wilfulness, so I refused him. But, Cecil, for all that I loved him, and I shall go down to my grave loving him still."

"You shall never regret your confidence, May," he answered, gravely; "and, dear, if you ever think differently, if it is ever of any use, will you send for me?"

And she whispered "Yes!"

It was impossible to hide from Lady Merton all that had happened, and she would have been very angry but that she deemed it inexpedient to quarrel with a young lady who was still an heiress; and so life was not quite so pleasant as it had been at Meadowview, and May was very glad to write to Mrs. Anderson, and fix the 1st of July for her return to Clapham. The answer was prompt and affectionate—they would be delighted to have her; her uncle would meet her at Vauxhall.

But it chanced that Mr. Anderson was unusually busy, and chancing to run across Keith Foster, he begged him to go in his stead. The physician did not quite like the errand, but his consulting hours were over, and he had no excuse, as he agreed with the best grace he could muster.

It was certainly a shock to May to see him waiting for her; but she was too proud to be anything but composed. She pointed out her luggage in silence, and followed him to Mrs. Anderson's brougham, which had been sent from Clapham.

"I hope Marion is well!"

It was her first attempt at conversation.

"Perfectly," and he smiled. "We have most rapturous accounts from them. I wish you had stayed to see my brother, Miss Graham; I think you would admit he is worthy even of Marion."

"Your brother?"

"You surely know that Marion married my brother Henry!" he asked, in surprise.

"I thought she had married you," said Miss Graham, bluntly.

"May, you could not have thought that!"

"I did," persisted May. "You came to Clapham nearly every evening, and Marion always seemed delighted."

"Because she always hoped I should bring her news. A sailor's betrothed has an anxious life."

May remembered Marion's remark about her lover's profession, and understood it.

"Well," declared Miss Graham, "I dare say you think me very stupid, but I am sure it was most natural to fancy you and Marion were engaged; you were always coming."

"I did not come to see Marion."

"Well, you always devoted yourself to her!"

"Perhaps I was not allowed to devote myself to anyone else," in a low, dangerous whisper. Then, in his natural voice, "Have you enjoyed yourself?"

"Awfully!"

"And you are sorry to come back?"

"I shall be very glad to see my uncle and aunt."

"I suppose you will not stay long?"

May was conveniently deaf.

"We have not known each other very long," said the doctor, gravely; "and latterly I know you have had no very kind thoughts of me; but I can never forget that we once seemed near each other. Surely, Miss Graham, you have

punished me enough for my presumption, and will accord me a friend's privilege!"

In her heart May wished he would repeat his presumption.

"What is a friend's privilege?"

"To congratulate you on your engagement."

"I am not engaged!"

"Sir Cecil Graham's wishes are no secret."

"Well, I am not engaged to him; and I don't mind telling you that I never shall be; there is no more chance of it than there is of your marrying my cousin Marion."

"You have taken good care to prevent my marrying anyone," he said, sadly. "Oh! May, what an idiot I am. I know you can be nothing to me, and yet the very thought that this engagement is not formed—that you are still free—makes me unutterably happy."

"Do it!" said May, demurely. "Well I expect I shall be free all my life, Dr. Foster; if people cannot look over a mistake I shall certainly be free all my life."

"May!"

"I am nothing to you," she said, with a kind of choked sob in her voice; "you said so just now—you know you did."

"You are my heart's best love!" he answered. "It rests with you whether you are the whole world to me, my darling."

"You can't expect me to beg your pardon for saying no," said May, wilfully. "You know you can't, and you are always unkind to me now."

"May, will you say 'Yes,' now? Will you take away the sting of all the cruel things you have said to me by one touch of your lips?"

"I don't know," answered May. "You have made me very miserable; I have had to stay away from my home all the summer just because I didn't want to go to your wedding."

"I shall never have a wedding unless you are there. Then you really cared a little, May!"

"I cared a great deal," she whispered. And then and there a great content filled Keith's heart.

They were married in the autumn—in the bright September days; and long before that the Andersons had learned the true reason of May forsaking them because of Marion's wedding.

"If you had only asked a question, you foolish child, we could have set everything right."

It was a very different wedding from the one planned a year ago, but a very pretty one.

May showed herself very superstitious—not even a bow of ribbon that had appeared in the first tresserou would she suffer to make part of this.

She wore a white silk dress with a string of pearls round her neck—pearls fit for a king's ransom, which Sir Cecil himself had collected during his travels in the East.

The baronet came to the wedding a self-invited guest, and claimed the right to give away the bride.

One or two among the spectators guessed his secret and appreciated the generous motives that brought him there.

As May's guardian he had to explain her wealth to her husband, and though Keith Foster never wished to marry an heiress, he owned it was but just that Sir John's money should be restored to his only child.

The Mortimers went down hill very rapidly. Carefully as Sir Cecil kept the banker's secret it oozed out, and people gave the cold shoulder to a man who could rob his benefactor's only child.

Dr. and Mrs. Foster mingle in fashionable circles when his professional duties afford him leisure for social pleasures; and it is the opinion of the world at large that never was seen a happier, more devoted couple.

Ere this, in the mazes of the dance, May has touched hands with Lord Carlyon; ere this, at a flower-show, she has found herself in company with his unhappy, neglected wife; and at such moments a rush of thankfulness has filled her heart that fortune's frown saved her from the wretchedness of Lady Carlyon's fate.

One regret she has, and one only. Her cousin Cecil, her husband's devoted friend, their most frequent visitor, is still a bachelor.

Ladies have smiled in vain upon him. Meadowview and the Yorkshire estates are still without a mistress, for the baronet has never swerved from his first choice. But for even this time may hold a remedy.

There is a little girl in the Doctor's nursery with large, velvety brown eyes, and bright, vivacious spirits, who already recalls the May whom Lord Carlyon met in the gardens of Meadowview.

Wise people say that this child is destined to atone to Sir Cecil for the grief her mother innocently caused him.

It may be so, it may not. It lies in the future, for Keith's first-born is barely nine years old. Of course it would be a brilliant position for the little May; but her parents have but one wish respecting their child—it is that, if she is ever married, she may, like her mother, be wedded for love only!

[THE END.]

WHAT DO YOUNG MEN MARRY?

—*—

THIS is a very important question, and well deserving of profound attention and a serious answer. Truly, marriage is so serious a matter that it is a pity any person should for a moment attempt to view it as aught else; and, indeed, none but confirmed bachelors—who know not what marriage means—can ever do so.

Joke about rheumatism, if you will; jest on toothaches as you list; be facetious in regard to your income-tax; but eschew levity in speaking, writing, or thinking on matrimony. Of all serious subjects, place marriage at their head.

But if to marry is so serious a business, the question, "What do young men marry?" is also important. Now, no doubt, many of our readers have already answered that question in their own minds, or at least come to the conclusion that it can be easily answered.

Not so fast, my fair sir or madam. No, not "wives" certainly; for while a man cannot marry his grandmother, paternal or maternal, yet he cannot marry his wife. So have a little patience and you will find that you are as completely at a loss for an answer to that question as I am myself, for sometimes we are fairly puzzled to know what or for what young men marry.

Again, then, what do young men marry? I reply, anything, everything, the most extraordinary thing conceivable. For instance, a friend of mine married a curl. Yes, a real curl. But let me tell you how it was.

Smith, my friend, went to a picnic, "just a few friends, you know." While there he met Fanny P—. Fanny wore curlies which, on this occasion, combs were ineffectual to confine; especially one ringlet, which waved in the breeze and danced with each zephyr that fanned her cheek. "Was charming." So Smith glanced at it again and again, admired it, thought of it, and when he left her that evening, dreamt of it.

But, alas! he had a rival, and what was worse, he was one of those careless, easy and good-natured sort of men who are the most disagreeable of all rivals, as they do not seem to be disconcerted by the appearance of another candidate on the field.

Nothing would do him but he must make Smith his confidant. Smith endured all his commendations of Fanny with, under the circumstances, praiseworthy patience, until one day the loquacious youth, after expatiating on her eyes, nose, mouth, lips, and other features, unfortunately introduced that particular curl.

This was too much for Smith. He could have endured everything but that. He retired from the field, fortifying himself with the noble resolution: "Shall I succumb to a daughter of Eve—to a smiling face—to a glossy curl?" But in vain did he determine to banish all recollection of the past. Go where he would that curl accompanied him. It waved in every tendril; it haunted him in his solitude, and he could not forget it in company; it visited him, too, in his dreams.

His resolution failed. Again he courted it; again he fell in love with it; and at last, shameful to relate, he married it. Fortunately, however, it happened to be attached to a nice, neat, sensible girl, and the marriage did not turn out so bad as might be expected.

Still the fact remains—he married a curl; and I do believe that if that same curl had passed into the possession of some other person, he would have worn his hair long, gone about with his hands in his pockets, sighed, hummed some sentimental tunes, and, in short, manifested all the symptoms of unrequited affection.

In like manner I have known one young man to marry an eye, another a lip, and a third allied himself to an eyebrow.

The eye fortunately turned out a good wife, but it was purely accidental.

What George S—— married I may be excused from not being able to make out since he himself did not seem to know exactly.

When questioned closely George will say—“Eh? Well, you know, there was something about her that—that—Well, I can’t very well tell you what it was—a sort of indescribable kind of—well, you know what I mean.” Curiously enough, however, he married it, and it turned out a very good wife.

Some young men, again, marry dimples. One I know married a beauty spot made of court plaster; while a second cousin of my aunt’s sister married an expression—I believe an amiable expression.

It is very difficult, however, in the absence of accurate statistics on the subject, to say decidedly which feature is the most sought after, but the contest I think lies between the hair and the eyes.

The mouth, too, is sometimes married; the chin not so often. It was only the other day that a very sensible friend of mine fell in love with a braid.

He was so far gone that he soon became engaged to that braid; but, just then she took a new way of dressing her hair. The charm was dissolved, and the match was happily broken off, and at present there is no appearance of its being renewed.

What do young men marry? They marry all these and many other bits and scraps for a wife instead of the true thing. Some, more sagacious, marry an eye, a lip, a set of teeth, and a head of hair—all together.

Some, too, marry a fortune; but as Providence generally sends a woman with it, he marries her too.

Some marry cards, and one young man was so fond of cards that meeting a young lady whose mother was a great hand at what he married her. So, practically speaking, he might be said to have married his mother-in-law.

So young men marry and so they settle; and such as the marriage is, so will their after life be. He who would have a wife must marry a woman. If he can meet with one of like social position, like education, similar disposition, kindred sympathies, and habits congenial to his own—let him marry her—that is, if she is willing.

But let young men beware of marrying an eye, however bewitching, a neck, however beautiful, a curl, however charming, or any number of features, however nice they may appear in their eyes. Let them marry a whole woman not a part.

Young ladies, too, make some queer matches, and unite themselves to whiskers and imperials waist-coats, and breast-pins.

Much may be said, however, in extenuation of their conduct. One excuse is that they do not commonly go out courting, and to court, but rather wait to be sought for; and, having a so much narrower circle to choose from than the sterner sex they may easily be excused when perhaps their best choice does not nearly equal their best imaginings.

GOOGLES are worn by the officers and sailors on the fast English torpedo-boats, because the high speed is hurtful to the eyes.

FACETILE.

MAUD: "And you're sure you want me for myself, Dick?" Dick: "No, for myself."

"What are our young men coming to?" walls a post. Coming to see our girls, of course.

MR. RICHELLO: "What a perfect complexion Miss Beatti has!" Rival Belle: "She's a born artist."

ALF: "It was a case of love at first sight." Bob: "I thought he couldn't have got a real look at her."

SHE: "Have you ever loved another?" He: "Yes, of course. Did you think I'd practice on a nice girl like you?"

ETHEL: "Henpeck more than shows his years." Will: "Yes; he has to carry part of his wife's. She still sticks to thirty."

"BEWARE of the vidders, Samival," said old Weller. "Werry good, old man," returned Samuel. "I'll never have one if I can help it."

THEIR is a deplorable tendency nowadays in some parents to disobey their children. Nothing so annoys a child as a hesitating compliance.

"HE is a rising young author." "Yes," was the reply; "every time I go to see him I find he has economised by moving one story higher."

MISTRESS: "Did you manage to find the basket of eggs that was on the pantry floor, Annie?" Servant: "Oh, yes mum—aisily. I shtepped it in."

SHE: "Do you believe in football for ladies?" He: "Yes, indeed, I do." She: "Then you're a New Man, I suppose?" He: "No; I'm a surgeon."

PHYSICIAN: "And you have felt like this for several days?" "H'm! Let me see your tongue." Humorous Patient: "It's no use, doctor; no tongue can tell how I suffer."

"WHAT more can woman want?" he asked. "Is not the world at her feet now?" "Of course it is," replied the New Woman. "You do not expect her to walk on her hands, do you?"

OLD MAN: "That cat made an awful noise in the back garden last night." Young Man: "Yes, father; I suppose that since he ate the canary he thinks he can sing."

CHOLLEY CHUMPY: "I see that earrings are coming into fashion again. Have your ears ever been bored?" Miss Caustic: "What a question! Haven't I often listened to your twaddle?"

STUDENT: "Several of my friends are coming to dine here, so I want a big table." Mine Host: "Just look at this one, sir. Fifteen persons could sleep quite comfortably under it."

A: "I would never marry a widow. They are always looking after Number One." B: "I don't agree with you. It seems to me they are invariably looking after Number Two."

SPIKES: "I find I've been and married a New Woman. What the deuce shall I do with her?" Candid Friend: "Do with her, my boy! The real question is, What will she do with you?"

COMMERCIAL TRAVELLER (to village shopkeeper): "How's his, Mr. Sharpe?" "Can't complain, just made twelve-and-sixpence!" "How was that?" "Man wanted to get trusted for a pair of boots, and I wouldn't let him have 'em!"

CANNIBAL (to captured missionary): "Have you any particular wish before you are dished up?" Missionary: "I should like to deliver one more lecture on the advantages of a vegetarian diet."

"DO you find this weather oppressive?" he asked. "Yes," she replied; "it's very hot and tiresome." "Would it make matters more endurable if I were to propose to you?" "Oh, yes. Do propose ice-cream, soda-water, and a drive."

YOUNG LITWEAYTE (as his partner takes a difficult backhander at Tennis): "Well played, indeed, Miss Livingston. Capital stroke." Miss Livingston: "That's right, Mr. Litweayte; if you'll keep on applauding and let me attend to the ball, I think we can win the game."

A SENSELESS QUESTION: City Youth (to country boy digging worms): "Going to get some fish for your dinner, sonny?" Sonny (disgusted): "Naw; goin' ter git some worms for the fishes dinner."

UGLYMUG: "Sir, what do you mean by staring me out of countenance?" Binks: "Sir, if it were possible to stare you out of such a countenance you should be grateful to the starer thereof!"

"I WONDER," mused the family cat, after carefully inspecting the new mouse-trap, "if that is intended as a labour-saving device for my benefit, or if I'm in danger of losing my situation."

"BY JOVE!" exclaimed Dudelin, "there's a splendid necklace in that millinery window." "That's a bonnet," said his lady friend. "Well," he blurted, "what's the difference?" "Oh, very well," said she; "you buy it and see."

GENTLEMAN: "Oh, madam; how pleased I am to see you again; it is four years since last we met." Lady: "And you knew me at once?" Gentleman: "To be sure I did. I should have known that hat anywhere."

INQUISITIVE FRIEND: "I suppose you wouldn't be defending that bank thief if you thought he really took the money?" Bright Lawyer: "I wouldn't be defending him if I didn't think he took enough to pay my bill!"

KEEPHAM: "Hello, Lendham! You look wet. Where is your umbrella?" Lendham: "You have it." Keepham: "By Jove! So I have. Awfully sorry, really. I'll send it around to you as soon as I get home. So long, old man. Better take a cab, or you may take cold."

WATTS: "You won't mind my leaving my wheel here in your office, will you? I know you don't ride one, but—" Poite: "No, I don't ride one very well yet, but I began taking lessons yesterday—" "Er—come to think of it, I guess I won't impose on your good nature, old man."

CITY MAN (spending the day in distant suburb): "Didn't it ever strike you that your servant is impertinently inquisitive?" Subber: "My dear fellow, it's only the way of a privileged old family retainer. Why, would you believe it!—that girl has been with us over six weeks!"

"DEAR me," said Mr. Meek; "it seems so absurd for men to be constantly talking about their wives having the last word. As for me, I never object to my wife having the last word." Mr. Brave: "You don't?" Mr. Meek: "Not a bit. I always feel thankful, when she gets to it."

EMINENT SPECIALIST: "Yes, madam, your husband is suffering from temporary aberration, due to overwork. The form of his mania is quite common." Wife: "Yes, he insists that he's a millionaire." Eminent Specialist: "And wants to pay me £250 for my advice. We'll have to humour him, you know."

"YEAH," said Mr. Jones, "this bicycling craze is a splendid thing. If it continues as popular as it is now we shall have good, smooth, hard roads in every direction within the next ten years." "For my part," Mrs. Jones replied, "I wish they'd have good soft roads—at any rate while I'm learning and fall off so often."

"Oh, yes," remarked Dudley, in a self-satisfied way. "Lulu and I will start married life under very favourable circumstances. Her mother gives us a neat little home, her father furnishes it, and her uncle has stocked one of the neatest stables in the city. Besides, Lulu has a neat income in her own name." Friend: "What part do you furnish?" Dudley: "Well—principally the name—principally the name."

"CAN you refer me to a work from which I can learn how the ancients constructed those catapults that would throw stones half-a-mile?" Friend: "Don't believe I can. Why do you want such information?" Conscientious Landlord: "Well, you see, I've advertised those new villas of mine as being within a stone's throw of the station, and now I have got to rig up some plan for throwing that stone. I am enterpriseing, but I am not a liar."

SOCIETY.

THE German Emperor is about to take to bicycling, and a track for his private use is being laid down at Potsdam.

PRINCE AND PRINCESS HENRY OF PRUSSIA will represent the Court of Berlin at the coronation of the Emperor and Empress of Russia.

EVERYTHING which the Czarita's baby is to wear is English. The entire layette, the fashion of the tiny cot, the nurse engaged, are all of the land which is dearest to Princess Alix's heart.

THERE is a rumour that the Queen intends to pay a visit in the spring to the Duke of Norfolk at Arundel Castle.

THE Queen is expected at Windsor to breakfast on the morning of November 11th, and will remain there about a month, proceeding thence to Osborne, where, as usual, the Christmas and New Year period will be passed. It is expected that the Queen will return to Windsor about the middle of February, and remain there until her departure for the Continent at the end of March.

THE Queen will probably visit Sheffield next year, in order to open the new town-hall, which is being built at a cost of £100,000. If the Queen does go to Sheffield her visit will take place towards the end of May, when on her way from Windsor to Balmoral. The arrangements would be very much the same as when the Queen visited Manchester last year, and Her Majesty would arrive at Sheffield in the afternoon, and then proceed in the evening on her journey to Scotland.

THE 31st of August, 1896, is the date fixed upon for the formal betrothal of the young Queen of the Netherlands to Prince Charles II., son of the Crown Prince and Princess of Denmark. She will, on that day, complete her sixteenth year. The match meets with universal approval in Holland. Queen Wilhelmina has become quite a grown-up young lady, and it is her request that she be no more treated as a child.

THERE are rumours that the announcement will be made of the Hereditary Prince Alfred of Coburg's betrothal to one of the twin Duchesses Elsa and Olga, daughters of the late Duke William Eugene of Wurtemburg and of his widow. In such case there might be a double marriage in Coburg next spring, for as Prince Alfred is an heir-apparent, he could be married in his own State.

THE lion of the next season will again be of the Indian species. It is confidently expected that the Nizam of Hyderabad will be the Queen's guest for some weeks next spring. The Nizam is very powerful, very wealthy, and very loyal, and it is expected that his Highness will come in state with a big retinue. That he will be lavishly entertained is certain, as society will follow the royal lead, and the Queen and Prince of Wales will undoubtedly make much of so important a visitor.

IT is said that the Czar has drawn up the conditions under which he will allow the marriage of King Alexander of Servia with a Russian Grand Duchess to take place—viz., that King Milan shall disappear entirely from Servia. Milan shall sign a document never to put his foot again in Belgrade, and to take a voyage round the world. In this obligatory journey he will be accompanied by a noted Parisian artiste, and the Servian Government will again pay Milan's debts.

THE Dowager Empress of Russia and the Princess of Wales are enchanted to find themselves together at Bernstorff once more, for it was there they were educated, and played together as children in the Park. They walk out together daily now—going some distance from the Castle, and when they are tired halting the first cab they meet, and returning home in that modest guise. In the evening they play duets together on the grand in Queen Louise's apartments, the treasured instrument of priceless value that the late Czar gave to his wife's mother.

STATISTICS.

IN England more than 10,000,000 oil lamps are used nightly. Lamp accidents cause 300 deaths annually, and in London alone 165 fires in one year have been traced to them.

THE whole number of doctors in Great Britain is 25,086. Of this number 4,417 are in London, 11,775 on the provincial list, 2,206 in Scotland, 2,430 in Ireland, 1,717 reside abroad, and 2,493 are in the Army and Navy, the Indian medical service and the mercantile marine.

IN each year in England 15 people out of every thousand marry. Of each 1,000 men who marry 861 are bachelors and 139 widowers, while of each 1,000 women only 98 have been married before and 902 are spinsters; 12 marriages out of every 100 are second marriages. The average age at which men marry is 27 years, while the average age at which women marry is 25½ years. In England over one-half of the women between 15 and 45 are unmarried. Married women live as a rule, 2 years longer than single ones. If the mother die first, the father survives 9½ years; but if the father dies first, the survival of the mother is 11½ years as an average. 2,441 births occur in England daily, and February is the month in which the greatest number of births occur, June the month in which occur the fewest. The average number of births for each marriage is 4.33. Out of every 1,000 births 11 are twins.

GEMS.

AN argumentative man who lacks knowledge is like a fly buzzing in an empty bottle.

IT is right to look over self-accounts bravely in the face now and then, and settle them bravely.

THE vulgar mind fancies that judgment is implied chiefly in the capacity to censure; and yet there is no judgment so exquisite as that which knows properly how to approve.

PAINFUL diseases are not always fatal diseases. The most dangerous diseases often undermine the system in deadly silence. So an evil which causes heartache is not always as vicious as a sin which undermines the fibre and the stamina of the soul in death-like silence.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

ALMOND SAUCE.—Boil half a cup of sugar and one cup of water, and then skim. Add quarter of a pound of almonds that have been blanched and chopped fine; cook ten minutes; take from the fire and add half a teaspoonful of bitter almond flavouring.

WELSH RABBIT.—Put a tablespoonful of butter into the chafing-dish. When melted add one and one-half pounds of fresh cheese cut into small pieces, a teaspoonful of dry mustard, a pinch of cayenne pepper and half a pint of milk. Stir continually and serve hot on toast as soon as it is done.

BAKED TOMATOES.—Peel and slice a quarter of an inch thick and place in a pudding-dish. Season each layer with a little salt, pepper, and a little sugar. Cover with a plate and bake half an hour. Then take off the cover and brown for fifteen minutes. Just at last pour over two or three tablespoonfuls cream.

CRAB SANDWICH.—Pick carefully, from back and claws, the meat and eggs from twelve crabs. Put into a bowl and mash with a silver fork. Add to this a lump of butter the size of a walnut, two hard-boiled eggs chopped fine, seasoning of red or black pepper, and one tablespoonful of Worcestershire sauce, or twice the quantity of tomato cataup. Cut some slices of bread very thin; spread with the preparation, cover each slice with one from which the crust has been cut. Heat slightly in the oven, or serve cold.

MISCELLANEOUS.

THE Pacific is fully a mile deeper than any other ocean.

IN Jewish marriages the bride stands on the right of the groom. It is the custom of all other races for the bride to stand on the left side of the groom.

ALL the school buildings of Chicago are overcrowded, and it is estimated that fully eleven thousand children are kept from going to school through a lack of accommodation.

THE largest flower in the world grows in Sumatra. It is called the Rafflesia Arnoldi, and some of the specimens are each 39 inches in diameter. The central cup will hold six quarts of water.

GUTTA PERCHA does not appeal to most people as an article of diet, but there is a small, an exceedingly small, sub-marine animalcule that positively delights in it. This interesting creature is called the "gribble," and it is only really happy while it is browsing on the gutta percha that is used for the sheathing of submarine cables.

AMERICA, the land of mechanical invention, can boast of some remarkable clocks. The Columbus clock, for instance, not only shows the revolution of the earth on its axis, but also its position in its orbit about the sun, and the position of the other planets in their orbits. Moreover, it has miniature models of the Declaration of Independence, together with an automatic figure of President Lincoln emancipating a number of slaves.

THE bridal veil is of Eastern origin, being a relic of the canopy held over the heads of the happy pair. The old British custom was to use Nature's veil unadorned—that is, the long hair of the bride, which was so worn by all brides, royal, noble and simple. Only then did all behold the tresses of maidenhood in their entirety, and for the last time, as after marriage, this badge of virginity was neatly dressed on the head. Among some the tresses were cut and carefully stowed away when a woman became a wife. It is customary in Russia for village brides to excise their locks on returning from church. The peasants of that country have a pretty song, the gist being the lamentation of a newly-married wife over her golden curls, just cut off, ere she laid them low.

BECAUSE of the grace, slightness and elegance of its figure, the birch tree has been well named the Lady of the Woods. Though not much used in the timber trade, it is nevertheless employed in a variety of other ways. The birch-bark canoe of the red Indian has never been surpassed in boats of this class. There is starch enough in its bark to form a rude kind of bread for the semi-savage folk in the icy north. It yields an oil which gives to Russia leather its agreeable odour. In Russia they use the wood for roofing boxes, jars, shoes, carriages, furniture and spoons, of which last-named article as many as thirty millions are made annually of its branches. Excellent brooms are made of its twigs, as many a boy can tell, having often figured in what has been called "a bad quarter of an hour." Indeed, does not "to birch" mean "to chastise"?

PEOPLE who cut up very valuable timber into merchantable shape have always felt a certain amount of regret at the great waste as seen in the enormous piles of sawdust that accumulates. For this reason it has been economy to use band-saws, which are extremely thin and durable. Circular saws have not heretofore been as available for this work on account of their much greater thickness, but, being cheaper and much more easily managed, they have been used, even though the waste of material incident thereto has been great. By a new means, a twelve-gauge fifty-four-inch circular saw has been operated, and the inventor says that it behaves in the most approved fashion in all respects, doing the work as well as thick saws and standing the strain in the most satisfactory manner. This is of a great deal of importance, as a thin circular saw can be operated where a band-saw is difficult to handle, and is therefore an economy and also much more convenient.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

CARRIER.—Quite a matter of opinion.

TIT FOR TAT.—April 4th, 1877, came on Wednesday.

X. Y. Z.—We know of no society likely to help you.

TOY.—The average height is about five and a half feet.

LOVER OF THE STAGE.—Never heard of any play so named.

ANXIOUS READER.—There is no public institution of the sort.

DISTRACTED ONE.—Inquire at the prison where he is confined.

OLD MADRID.—Alphonse III., King of Spain, is nine years old.

AGED P.—Criminals were formerly beheaded in England.

CAPTAIN TOM.—Everything depends on the rules of the society.

UNHAPPY MOTHER.—Write to the secretary, Stepney-circusway, E.

BREVIL.—It would be against our rules to comply with your request.

BEGINNER.—Opinions differ very much as to which system is best.

VIOLETTA.—You might try sponging with a little ammonia water.

MADGE MEADOWS.—A pall of cold water will purify the air of the room.

AMATEUR.—Very heavy unbleached muslin will do to paint the scenes on.

DUNCAN FIELD.—There are dozens of such books. Consult your bookseller.

A BRIDE ELOIOT.—A marriage in the name now commonly used will be legal.

Y. C. A.—Yes, they would interbreed if taken young and brought up together.

WILLIAM TELL.—Ascertain the address and write to the secretary for information.

DEPARTING LU.—It is impossible for us to judge what position you are qualified to fill.

ARGUMENTATIVE.—The Free Education Act was passed by the Conservative Government.

UNCLE JOE.—The age for admission to the Blue Coat School is from seven to nine years.

SUFFERING ONE.—We strongly recommend you to take the advantage of skilful local advice.

JANE ANNIE.—Against our rules to give addresses. The material has been widely advertised.

IGNORANT LASSIE.—Scotland-yard is the "head department" of the London Metropolitan Police.

CHRIS.—Sweet oil and emery powder, while for rubber nothing is better than a spongey piece of figtree wood.

MARY JANE.—A little vinegar in polish will obviate the dead oily look so often noticed after cleaning furniture.

RIVAL.—No great skill is required to paint the curtains, but some experience is necessary to do the work acceptably.

HERIE NOU.—Give it worms, beetles, birds' eggs, mice, bread and milk. You will find hardly anything comes amiss to it.

VINCENT DALYMPLE.—The force is almost exclusively recruited in the colony. For the present recruiting is suspended.

LILAC.—You can remove brown stains from baking dishes by dipping a damp flannel in whiting, and rub well with it.

L. C. D.—It may be cleaned with a piece of chamois skin dipped in powdered pumice stone. Rub gently and thoroughly.

WORKED HOUSEKEEPER.—Charcoal kept in the refrigerator in a small saucer helps to keep meat and butter untaunted.

WATER LILY.—You can make them as tight as ever by washing them with hot soap-suds, and leaving them to dry in the open air.

LIMA M.—Queen Victoria did not succeed to the crown of Hanover—the laws of that country forbidding it to be worn by a female.

S. L.—Some strong good gliding will bear to be gone over lightly with a camel's hair brush dipped in warm spirits of wine, and let dry.

SCOPERS.—Believers in omens have existed in every country. They lived in ancient times, and are still numerous at the present day.

GUSAR.—Logic is the art of employing reason effectually in inquiring after truth, not assuming positions without proving their correctness.

GEORSE.—Instead of milk substitute water with the bread, and squeeze if almost dry. Add dry biscuits and other seeds such as rape and canary.

IN SEARCH OF KNOWLEDGE.—The Celtic race, like all other races, came from a district in Central Asia in at least two successive waves, one much in advance of the other; the Celts in Scotland belong to the latter wave.

JOLLY JACK TAR.—To get on board a merchant ship as midshipman, a premium is required. The most lucrative employ is the merchant service.

CONSTANT READER.—Sprinkle it with insect powder, and give it dry food, such as biscuits, bread, nuts, and seeds, and a very little water, and nothing sweet.

MAYPOLE.—You should have no difficulty in getting wholesome porridge and milk, lentil soup, and bread, with syrup—all flesh-forming and fattening food.

F. R. N.—One ounce oxalic acid, one ounce Prussian blue, five quarts of water—stir now and again for twenty-four hours. Strain through muslin and bottle.

J. S.—Volunteers are entitled to travel to any important sporting shooting meeting at a reduced rate; they must either be in uniform or show their entry ticket.

UNEMPLOYED.—The commercial towns of America are swarming with well-educated young men seeking employment as clerks, shopmen, and other light occupations.

SCANTY HAIR.—All depends upon what is causing your hair to fall out; if your system is down there are, of course, doctors who could deal with that successfully.

IN WANT OF ADVICE.—As you do not say anything about the numerous remedies you have tried without avail we might just recommend something that had failed if we in turn suggested remedies.

AT HER WIFE'S END.—It is imperative in all attempts to cure the drink crave that the patient should be a consenting party; there is no known cure that can be administered without the patient's knowledge.

MIGNONETTE.

It all comes back from the long ago
With the scent of the mignonette,
A picture fair in the sunset glow
And a word I can never forget.

She stood by my side in a snow-white gown,
And her face was drooping low,
But 'neath the waves of hair so brown
I could see the blush roses grow.

She held a cluster of mignonette,
The flower I loved the best;
It seems to me I can see her yet
As she fastened it on her breast.

"Oh, sweet," I said, "I have loved you long;
But I was afraid to speak,
Save only in flowers and tender song,
For my faith is very weak.

"And now I must know the truth, dear love,
My fate—what is it to be—
Bright as the sunset sky above,
Or dark as you restless sea?"

And ever, forever, the echo sounds
Her answer so sad and low;
But only one word in my heart sounds,
The saddest of all words "No!"

The world has always kind to me,
Fair fortune favours me yet;
But it all comes back in my memory
With the scent of the mignonette!

E. B. B.

MARINER.—In the Royal Navy cadets, who are entered by interest, become, in the course of time, midshipmen, and if they live long enough may eventually rise to the rank of admiral.

SPOUT.—Gun barrels are stained, not varnished; to keep them from rusting when hung up they must get a coat of sweet oil, or be powdered over with dry quicklime, or be kept in flannel gun cases.

DUCK.—Snakes can climb trees, or any surface that is rough. On the under side of their bodies are scales, and by these they grasp the rough bark. On an absolutely smooth surface a snake can make no progress.

D. C. J.—Do not be deterred from going into society by remarks which would lead one to believe that to mingle in it at all is morally hurtful. Good men and women are to be found if we look for them. Every community has in itself the nucleus of a society.

M. F. T.—We think the Globe Parcel Express would undertake the transmission of the goods from Malta; your friend being there should be able to find out for himself the best and cheapest means of sending home his property.

LAUNDRY MAID.—It is a good plan to put a little turpentine in the starch, then after it is ironed pass a damp rag lightly over the breast and apply a hot polishing iron. A polishing iron is round, and if you rub heavily it gives a beautiful gloss.

DENIS ADAIR.—You must be a civil engineer in order to become an inspector, and that involves a two to four years' apprenticeship in a civil engineer's office, in addition to attending classes in the university and engaging in public works.

EQUINUS.—People are cross-eyed, or have strabismus, because some of the muscles of the eyeball are too long or too short, and thus turn the eye out of its proper position. Some cases of this kind are curable by a skilful surgical operation.

MAID OF HONOUR.—Maids of Honour have a salary of between three and four hundred pounds per annum, and during the time they are in waiting, each about two months in the year, they reside in the palace, and usually take their meals at the Royal table.

E. D. C.—You can try isinglass, alum, soap, equal parts. Dissolve each separately and mix the solution, with which imbue the cloth on the wrong side. Dry and brush the cloth well, first with a dry brush and afterwards lightly dipped in water.

HIGHLAND LASS.—"The Blue Bells of Scotland" was the work of Annie McVicker, afterwards Mrs. Grant, the daughter of a Scottish officer in the British army. The melody was long believed to be Scottish, but is now known to be of English origin, being an old English folk song.

GALLER HERRIN.—Draw the gut out of the fish, lay them for twenty-four hours in a strong pickle of salt water, containing a little saltpetre (this is sometimes dispensed with), then draw them out of the liquor, and pack them in barrels with plenty of salt between each layer, and an extra dose on top of all.

WORRICK.—The best plan we know of is larded plates with flat sticks placed round as a ladder for them. These plates, when a goodly number of the pests are assembled on them, should be held over the fire and the pests will fall in with the melting lard. Persevere, and you will after a time be rid of them.

Cousin.—A brown stain is made by boiling equal parts of pine and alder bark in six times their bulk of water till all the colouring matter is extracted, and when cold adding a small quantity of alcohol; or saffron boiled for twelve or fifteen hours gives a good brown stain, to which add alcohol when cold to make it set.

ROGER.—George III. died on 29th January, 1820; his son, George IV., had been reigning for ten years previously, from December 1811, as Prince Regent; he was of course crowned King when his father died; he died himself on 26th January, 1830; there are 670 members in the House of Commons—103 for Ireland, 70 from Scotland, and rest from England.

DISTRESSED.—A wife has a right to expect candour at the hands of her husband, and if it be withheld, be the reasons what they may, she should not be blamed for worrying about it. We trust, as we have suggested, that you have attached undue importance to the matter in question, and that are long it will be proved, to your satisfaction, that you have made "Much Ado about Nothing."

ONE IN ALARM.—Baldness at your age indicates either a system out of order or descent from hairless ancestors; if you are in the habit of wearing a close cap or hat continually, or sit under a gas or lamp, or in a close, bad atmosphere, your trouble might be traceable to any or all of these causes; washing the head is always beneficial to the hair, because it keeps the scalp clean and healthy; some find pure paraffin oil, perfumed, to be an excellent hair specific.

BROWN EYES.—Artificial flowers are made of cambric, silk, velvet, feathers, wax, shells, insects, lace, hair, coral, seaweed, ivory, whalebone, wood, ebony, metal, &c.; but the artificial flowers of commerce are restricted to those which are formed of textile fabrics and feathers. The feather flowers are mostly from Brazil, or made from the feathers of South American birds. Those made from linen and other fabrics are made in France, England, and the United States.

S. D. G.—It is said that stammerers rarely, if ever, show any impediment of speech when speaking in whispers. On this fact a new method of treatment has been founded, which is as follows: For the first ten days speaking is prohibited. This will allow rest to the voice, and constitute the preliminary stage of treatment. During the next ten days speaking is permissible in a whispering voice, and in the course of the next fifteen days the ordinary conversational tone may be gradually employed.

CHOCMERS.—Next year will be the last leap year of the century, and another will not occur until 1904. The year 1904 will not be a leap year. The unusual occurrence is due to the fact that the addition of one day to each fourth year more than makes up the presumed deficiency in the calendar year, and consequently the world is constantly losing time as a watch is losing it, and therefore there was danger that in the course of a few thousand years the Fourth of July would come on Christmas.

THE LONDON READER, Post-free. Three-halfpence Weekly; on Quarterly, One Shilling and Eightpence.

ALL BACK NUMBERS, PARTS AND VOLUMES are in print, and may be had of all Booksellers.

NOTICE.—Part 410, Now Ready, price Sixpence, post-free, Eightpence. Also Vol. LXIV., bound in cloth, £1.60.

THE INDEX TO VOL. LXIV. IS NOW READY; PRICE ONE PENNY, post-free, Three-halfpence.

NOT ALL LETTERS TO BE ADDRESSED TO THE EDITOR OF THE LONDON READER, 824, STRAND, W.C.

* * * * * We cannot undertake to return rejected manuscripts.

London: Published for the Proprietor, at 824, Strand, by G. F. CORNARD; and printed by WOODWARD and KINSEY, 70 to 74, Long Acre, W.C.